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CHERRY.

Mrs. Sophy Beckett

BY THE AUTHOR OF "A GREAT MISTAKE."

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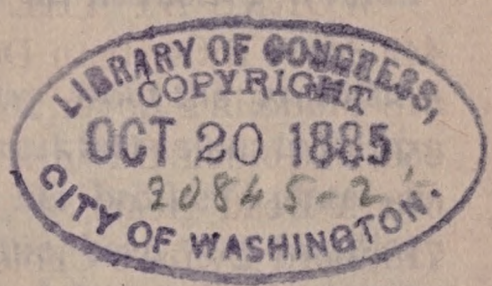

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CHERRY.

CHAPTER 1.

BREAKFAST was ready, and Miss Beauclerk was waiting for her brother.

The windows of the house in Eden Row were thrown wide open to the spring sunshine, but there was so little to be seen from them —only the red-brick houses over the way, and the budding lilacs pushing here and there their green leaves through the rusty railings —that the lady, no doubt, found the study of her own face in the oblong mirror over the chimney-piece a more agreeable method of passing the time,

Not that the contemplation of its clear outlines and unfaded tints appeared, judging from her expression, to afford her unmixed satisfaction, as she stood steadily peering at her own reflection; now lifting the heavy, fair hair from her temples, and putting her eyes closer to the glass to inspect it, and again drawing back and turning to the light that was beating in at the open windows, so as to scrutinize the lines about her eyes, and the contour of her throat and chin, in the unflattering brightness of the April morning.

It was a handsome, clever, composed face that she saw; and in her clean linen gown, absolutely devoid of trimming or ornament, and with her tall figure, and upright bearing, Frances Beauclerk was undoubtedly a remarkable-looking, even an attractive woman still.

Yet she sighed, as she at last moved away from the greenish-tinted old mirror, and, going back to the breakfast-table, took up for the twentieth time a letter that lay beside her brother's plate—a letter written in a hand which had, at one time, been very familiar to Miss Beauclerk. She had a whole bundle of letters in the same hand upstairs in an old Japanese box, smelling of some quaint foreign scent, in which she kept various mementos and trophies of her girlish days.

Only the night before—reminded of her old lover by lighting

upon the not common name of Vanbrugh in the list of those injured in a recent railway accident—she had opened her cabinet of treasures, and looked over the yellowing envelopes addressed in the same thick black writing, with the bold capitals and dashes, that had met her eye that morning when she entered the little parlor.

It was when she was a young beauty in her first season that Miss Beauclerk had refused William Vanbrugh, the head-clerk in her father's office, and sent him away, in despair, to seek his fortune and forgetfulness in New Zealand. She had not thought very much about it at the time. There were so many other luckless young men to be refused, and her life was so full of pleasures just then, and of hints of greater conquests to come, that Miss Beauclerk had not much time to devote to her rejected suitors.

And if, later, when the crash came, and friends and lovers fell away, if then Frances found herself thinking sometimes about poor Will Vanbrugh and his passionate prayers and protestations, what was the good of such thoughts? He was far enough away by that time. He did not know what had befallen her. They had never heard from him since the day when he had sailed, and had sent that short blotted note from the hotel at Liverpool, bidding her farewell, and sending her his forgiveness for her cruelty, and a blessing, in broken, incoherent words.

No, it was of no use to remember the poor fellow now. And yet Miss Beauclerk went on thinking of him in a vague and fitful fashion, as she thought sometimes, in the dusk of the evening, when she sat alone, of the old happy days of her life, and all that belonged to them.

The happy days ended abruptly and cruelly with that awful one when they had found her father lying dead on the library floor, his eyes staring horribly up at them, and a little empty bottle clinched in his stiffened hand. That dreadful hour marked, as with a ghastly finger, the division between their wealth and their poverty.

Frances and her young brother followed the dead man out of the luxurious house, in which, motherless, they had grown up together, and they never went back to it again. Nor did Miss Beauclerk's London adorers seek her in the smoky provincial town in which the orphaned boy and girl found shelter after the storm that had burst upon their bewildered heads.

An engagement which the young lady had formed was broken off by the gentleman's family with but scant ceremony. Perhaps Frances would have been the first to set her lover free, if she could have believed that it was her fortune, and not her handsome spirited

face, that had charmed him. And certainly she bore herself very proudly during their farewell interview, even contriving to laugh when Lord Wastelands spoke about his heart and his mother's wishes.

Miss Beauclerk took pains to restore all his not very valuable presents down to the minutest trifles, and as she did so she gravely assured the embarrassed young man that they were hardly the worse for wear, and would serve, with a little polishing up, for the next heiress who might be put up for sale in the Mayfair market.

And so Lord Wastelands went away, hanging his head, and left handsome Frances Beauclerk, looking like a queen in her black gown, alone with her brother, in the little old house which had belonged to her godmother, and which, at the old lady's death, a year before, had been left, with a small legacy, to the then heiress. Frances had laughed, at the time, about her "property" in Lowford, but now she and Henry were glad to have a place in which to lay their heads.

Miss Beauclerk met misfortune calmly, and did her best to avert further misery. Before many months she had obtained, by her own exertions, a situation for her brother in the office of Fordyce Brothers, a large manufacturing firm in Conyngham Lane; and had put her shoulder to the wheel, besides, by going out herself as a visiting governess—her music-lessons especially being considered very well worth the terms she demanded.

Old Fordyce, amused by the young lady's straightforward and determined ways, and admiring her handsome face, had interested his wife in Miss Beauclerk, who, through that good-natured woman's influence, had secured several pupils among the most substantial families in Lowford.

The young governess never talked about "better days;" she was always cheerful, healthy, and interested in her work, and came, in consequence, to be rather looked up to by the people who employed her, and who, in their quiet provincial way, were quite aware of the subtle London odor that hung about Miss Beauclerk, and never forgot how near she had been to marrying a lord. They admired her, too, for her goodness to her brother, a rather heavy-looking uninteresting young man, who took after his father, and had none of Miss Beauclerk's stately blonde beauty, seeming fit for nothing but to plod on in the employment she had put into his hands, and let himself be led in all things by his clever sister.

It was Frances who chiefly supported the small house in Eden Row. Henry's salary was little more than enough to keep him in

clothes; and his sister, when she was mapping out her newly adjusted life, had told him, with her bright and somewhat contemptuous smile, that she would make him a trifling allowance from her earnings for pocket-money, as she supposed young men would smoke, no matter how bad it might be for their health and for their sisters' feelings. And so the two, having no relations living that they knew of, and being abandoned by the great world in which they had moved for a little time, settled down in their modest home, and closed the book of the past forever.

The house was an old red-brick building, like all the others in the tranquil and grassy old court called Eden Row, beyond whose iron gates the muffled roar of the great manufacturing town that surged on either side sounded like the far-off murmur of another and busier world.

Within the ancient gateway, from whose arch an old lamp swung and cast its shadow on the flags, were silence, quiet sunshine, green leaves fluttering. The passage seemed haunted by pensive memories of old-fashioned days, and of the generations whose feet had once paced its smooth-worn pavement to and fro, and who now lay at rest close by in the old church-yard of St. Mark's

The red-brick house was not without a charm of its own, in spite of its ugly mahogany furniture, its engravings of the Princess Charlotte, and its narrow windows. Its colors had been agreeably mellowed by time and smoke; the furniture was so threadbare as to be almost picturesque, and Frances had the good sense and good taste to let it all alone, and not attempt to introduce any modern prettinesses, which would only have been out of tune with the antiquated background of her godmother's belongings.

Here, then, for some years the brother and sister lived; and the monotonous tranquillity of their existence had been broken by only two occurrences—they could hardly be called events.

One was that poor Harry fell in love with the gentle little sister of a fellow-clerk, at whose mother's house he used sometimes to call on summer evenings to smoke a pipe with Ben, while little Melissa sewed in the green trellised porch, and filled the brown jug with beer, when the young men had emptied it during their talk about books and politics, and the other subjects that interested them out of business hours. Melissa had been to a very good boarding-school; she had pretty shy manners, and a great deal of natural refinement. She was of opinion that young Mr. Beauclerk talked very well, and was not all plain-looking when he smiled.

Sometimes Henry would help her to water the flowers in the little

strip of back-garden — mignonette and lupins, and gilly flowers, that were giving out their evening perfumes—and a little knot of which would be stuck in Melissa's belt. Melissa used to flush and tremble when Henry held the watering-pot for her, or filled it at the pump in the yard. She never seemed to notice how round-shouldered and clumsy he was, or how he trampled on the borders when he followed her along the walks.

And Henry found the companionship of the modest little thing very pleasant after his dull meals and hours at home, when Frances, if she found time to speak at all, was apt to laugh at him, and catch him up, and frighten the shy and blundering fellow with her hard, clever ways. Little Melissa looked up to him, and thought him very sensible, and so much better bred than the Lowford young men, for all his clumsiness and uncouth ways. She knew from Ben that young Mr. Beauclerk was not clever "in business," and would not be likely to get on very fast, but in other ways—

Two or three times, when Ben had work to do that delayed him at the office after hours, Henry had asked little Miss Garth to go for a walk with him across the fields beyond the factories, and he had told her a great many wonderful things about the birds and the flowers, and had quoted beautiful lines from the poets that seemed to set the swallows, and primroses, and the evening star so clearly before Melissa's eyes, that she could never forget the lines as long as she lived. Once they turned into the town instead of toward the meadows, and they looked into the shop-windows like two little children, and told each other what they would buy if they had money enough.

Everything that young Mr. Beauclerk chose, as Ben's shy little sister did not fail to remark, was for a house; a tiny little house, just fit, he declared, for a tiny little wife with big blue eyes that hardly ever looked up.

Melissa, blushing very pink, declared that she did not see how the color of—of his wife's eyes could matter, or what it had to do with bird-cages, and cottage pianos, and rosewood tables. But Henry declared that it did; and that, if he could not have the little blue-eyed wife, he did not want the bird-cage, or the piano either. And then he pressed Melissa's little hand in his big clumsy palm, and looked down under the brim of her straw bonnet with his kind ugly eyes, and they walked home in a sweet and troubled silence which neither of them could have broken for the world.

It was all very foolish, very pitiful; and no doubt it was as well that, another evening later, Miss Beauclerk, who happened to pass

by the Garths' house on her way home, saw her brother and Melissa walking slowly toward her in the dusk, with clasped hands, and heads drooping toward each other. Her exclamation of indignant surprise startled the sweethearts apart; and Melissa, turning pale at sight of her cold face, lost all control, and clung closer to Henry's arm.

Henry went home with his sister, when he had taken Miss Garth to her own door; and Frances did her best to talk calmly and without anger of the ridiculous discovery she had made. What could he mean, she pleaded, by compromising that poor girl so seriously? How was it possible for him to marry on his salary? What culpable weakness it all was! Miss Beauclerk wondered that Mrs. Garth, at least, had not more sense than to allow her daughter to become engaged to a penniless clerk who was barely able to support himself.

Here Henry, abashed and unhappy, explained that there had been no talk of an engagement—that Mrs. Garth was the kindest of women—that it was he alone who had been to blame.

Frances, with a relieved face, heard him to the end of his slow and broken sentences. If there were no engagement, she decided briefly, he must at once break with a connection that might end in a serious entanglement. She offered to go herself to the girl, and explain to her how impossible it was that there should be any talk of marriage for years and years to come, if ever. Miss Beauclerk would say nothing, she added, with a little tightening of her delicate mouth, as to Henry's taste in the matter, though she had certainly hoped that her brother would have looked higher.

Henry turned pale at the thought of his timid little Melissa left unprotected to his sister's inflexible explanations; he hastily promised that he would himself take steps to atone for his folly. He had not a word to say for himself during Miss Beauclerk's summing up of the case; he only sat biting his nails, and shuffling his awkward feet, and making abrupt exclamations of sorrow and impotent repentance.

All that she said was true, he acknowledged sadly, and with bowed head. He had been selfish and mad; and it was poor little Melissa who would have to suffer for his fault. He had promised Miss Beauclerk that he would give up going to the Garths. And, indeed, the summer evenings were all but over; the weather would not permit much longer of beer-drinking and conversation in the garden, or of rambles among the outlying fields and hedgerows of the old town.

No doubt it was the autumn air that made Ben Garth's little sis-

ter look so pale and wretched about that time. The little thing seemed to be drooping, like her own flowers, at the first touch of cold weather.

Henry could not bear to look at the child, when he met her at church or in the street. He would turn away and dart up side-ways and alleys, so as not to pass her or see the wistful and wondering look in her blue eyes. He could not sleep at night for thinking of her. Often Frances, stirring comfortably in her own even slumbers, would hear him tramping his floor till dawn, and he would come down to breakfast with great dark rings round his eyes. This was in the first year of their life in Lowford, and Henry was little more than a boy.

Once, in despair, he did say, coloring and stammering, that he thought Melissa would not be a great expense, and that if Frances would only consent to receive her as a sister, he was sure it would make them all much happier. But Frances broke into an impatient laugh and frightened him again.

"I can not support your wife, my poor Henry, as well as you," she said, not unkindly. "Don't you know that marriage is not for either of us, unless—which is unlikely—we can marry some one who is able to keep us? Pray don't speak of this any more. It pains me to have to refuse to listen to you."

The young man, stung by his sister's reminder that it was she who earned the most money, made a strong effort about that time to get some night-work, which should add to his modest salary, but he did not succeed. As Ben had told Melissa, Henry Beauclerk was not clever in business.

After awhile he heard that little Miss Garth had gone away to stay with a married sister in Manchester; and, except for a decided coolness between him and Ben, there was nothing left of his brief dream but an empty aching in his heart, and a few little ribbons and withered flowers, which he had locked away in his old school-boy desk.

There is no cure like absence, it is said, for the heart-ache; and young folk get over these little things so easily, though they seem dreadful for the time. No doubt little Melissa should have got over it like a sensible girl, and not have given the lie to people older and more experienced than herself, by remembering poor ugly tender Henry Beauclerk with so much obstinate fidelity. But, for all her gentleness and timidity, Henry's little sweetheart found strength to die for love of him.

She had always been delicate, her friends said, and Manchester

did not agree with her. But when Harry heard the news of her death—she was only eighteen—he rushed home to his sister through a great downpour of rain that was falling, and a painful scene ensued in Miss Beauclerk's parlor. Frances dreaded, ever after, to think of that day. Her brother demanded money of her, and, trembling, she gave it; and asked no questions as he rushed away again through the rain, not to return that night, or for many days after.

She went to the office and said that her brother was ill. And then, in unspeakable anxiety and dread, she went on with her lessons and household duties as usual, waiting for him to come back. She left a light burning every night in the hall, and his supper laid, when she went to bed. She had her work to do the next day, of course, and could not afford to lose her rest. And at last one evening late she heard him come in and go upstairs as quietly as usual, and lock himself into his room.

They met the next morning at breakfast as though nothing had happened; but Frances saw, not without a pang, that her brother had grown suddenly old and round-shouldered and gray, and that he went about looking more uncouth and moody and unhappy than ever.

The Garths, not long afterward, left Lowford, and went to settle in Manchester, where the little grave was that he had been to see; and, from that day forth, Henry never heard of them or saw them any more.

CHAPTER II.

As time wore on Miss Beauclerk ventured occasionally to reproach her brother, and to ask him, with a somewhat contemptuous smile, if he were the only one who had had to make sacrifices. This meant that Frances had lately refused an offer from the brother of one of her pupils who had been greatly impressed by her stately beauty. Young Hale was only a clerk in an office like Ben Garth and poor Henry; but he was earning quite a large salary, and could have offered Miss Beauclerk a really comfortable home. Nevertheless, Frances dismissed him as calmly as she had dismissed Lord Wastelands some years before.

She assured him that she did not mean to marry, that she had her brother's happiness to think of; and she thanked Mr. Hale for the honor he had done her, in a manner that made the young man feel, to the fullest extent, the presumption of which he had been guilty.

Miss Fordyce, the eldest daughter of Henry's employer, who was taking music-lessons at the time from Frances, could not help remarking Fred Hale's sudden attack of low spirits and the falling off in the frequency of his visits, and she spoke of it to her handsome governess. Frances looked as if she considered the subject unworthy of a moment's thought.

"A game or two of billiards will no doubt restore Mr. Hale to his usual high spirits," she returned calmly, as she penciled the fingering of an intricate passage for her pupil. "Now try that cadenza again. Nothing but sheer hard work will ever enable you to conquer it. It is difficult, of course; the more glory in learning to play it with absolute correctness."

"I don't think Fred Hale is so fond of billiards as all that," replied Jane Fordyce wistfully, letting her hands lie idly on the keys. Jane was engaged to Sir Charles West at the time of this conversation, though she was still practicing her music every day. But there had once been some little boy-and-girl fancy between her and Fred, which three years at a school in London had not succeeded in making her forget.

"We are wasting time," suggested Miss Beauclerk, in her severe bright way; and Jane began languidly to attack the penciled run. But, as Frances was buttoning her gloves at the close of the lesson, Miss Fordyce returned, with a faint blush, to the subject of young Hale's dejection.

"Do you really think Fred is dissipated, Miss Beauclerk?" she asked earnestly. "Do—do you think he is unhappy about anything?"

Frances turned and looked keenly at her pupil. Jane Fordyce had a sweet plain face and a gentle manner, and was altogether very nice for an heiress.

"Why should you suppose that I am in Mr. Hale's confidence?" the handsome governess demanded coolly. She did not feel that there was any cause for gratification in the conquest she had so unconsciously effected of poor Fred's heart, nor had she the faintest desire to noise it abroad. "And, besides, what would Sir Charles West say if he knew that the subject interested you so deeply?"

Jane blushed, but she answered very simply—

"I have known Fred all my life. Sir Charles West is little better than a stranger to me yet."

Again Miss Beauclerk searched the modest face with her brilliant hazel eyes.

"But you are engaged to him?" she said, some new interest becoming apparent in her tone.

"Yes"—smothering a sigh—"I am engaged to him, of course, and he is very—kind. He is coming down next week, papa, says, so you will see him, Miss Beauclerk. Every one says he is very handsome."

Frances broke into a little laugh.

"Kind, handsome—and a baronet!" she exclaimed gayly. "Really, Miss Fordyce, I can not help wondering more and more at your interest in poor Mr. Hale, who appears to me a very commonplace young man, indeed."

Miss Beauclerk very rarely permitted herself to converse on such personal matters with her pupils, but it seemed that something in poor Jane's face had struck her, and for once she broke her rule. Jane colored more deeply still now.

"When you care for people they never seem commonplace, I think," she said wistfully. "And Fred and I have grown up together, you know, Miss Beauclerk. However"—sighing—"I am engaged, as you say, and I suppose I ought not to take much notice of what he says or does, any more. I suppose there is no help for it."

"No help for your engagement?"—smiling. "I hope that you would not help it if you could. You are too sensible, surely, to think of such a thing?"

"I suppose I am!"—sighing again—and Miss Beauclerk, having buttoned her gloves at last, took her leave, a little flush adding new brilliancy to her looks.

A few days later Sir Charles West arrived at the house in the Crescent, with his kind, fussy old mother, and his appearance in Lowford formed the second of the two occurrences which have been mentioned as having broken the monotony of the Beauclerks' life. For it really had seemed, for a time, as if Frances were likely to have her revenge upon her recreant suitor, Lord Wastelands, by reappearing in the London world in all the splendor of her matured beauty, and as the wife of another man who, also, could make her "my lady," and who came of a far older family than the Wastelands, whose grandfather had, as everybody knew, been a pawnbroker.

Sir Charles West, it was said, had been influenced in his proposal to Miss Fordyce by motives of prudence; and, indeed, poor little Jane, nice and sweet as she was, was hardly the girl to take the fancy of a young man about town in his second season. The match,

in fact, had been arranged by Lady West and old Fordyce, who, being a self-made man, was naturally anxious to ally his daughter with blood rather than with money—of which he had enough to satisfy the most exacting of fond mothers.

And Lady West was as fond as she was exacting. Her boy was the best boy in the world, she had assured Mr. Fordyce, but he had been somewhat more extravagant than could be wished, and had had losses, and got into debt, and—to sum it all up—it was desirable, to say the least, that he should marry money. Mr. Fordyce, on the other hand, the lady supposed, with a frank smile, would like his charming little daughter to make a brilliant match and a figure in society.

And so little Jane found herself "taken up" with much energy by Lady West, who was never weary of urging upon her son the advantages which would arise from a marriage with the shy young heiress. After a good deal of half-laughing, half-serious protest from Sir Charles, the young man did at last propose in due form to old Fordyce's daughter, and Jane, when the London season was over, went back to Lowford engaged to a baronet, and was much looked up to in consequence by her younger sisters, and by her female acquaintances in general.

Then came Sir Charles's first visit to the fluttered family in the Crescent, and his introduction, accidentally one morning, to Frances Beauclerk.

The young man was certainly very much struck with the handsome and stately young governess, who came every day to teach Jane's little sisters; and he contrived to be present nearly always during the lessons which Jane herself still continued to take notwithstanding her promotion.

Jane explained somewhat eagerly to her future husband that she went on with them by way of keeping up her practice. She did not add that Fred Hale's sisters, too, were among Miss Beauclerk's pupils; and that the music-lessons somehow appeared to lead to a good deal of running to and fro between the two houses, and to the delivery of many messages by young Hale himself.

Jane was brave enough to have dared her father's anger—and old Fordyce had a terrible temper—and to have refused Sir Charles West for the sake of her old friend and playfellow, if Fred had given her the least encouragement. But he did not. He had never said a word which could lead her to suppose that he remembered their boy-and-girl romance as she did, or that he felt aggrieved by the fact of her engagement.

But then came Frances's refusal of poor Fred's suit, and the young man's very apparent low spirits. Silly little Jane never dreamt that her governess, handsome as she was, could have been the attraction which drew young Hale so often to the Crescent. She only observed that Fred's dejection became visible at the very time when Sir Charles West's first visit had been announced, and she drew her own tender and mistaken little conclusions from that fact.

How could she imagine that the foolish young man was breaking his heart and losing his rest for Miss Beauclerk, who seemed so dignified, and so—so old? Frances was then, in fact, nearly twenty-five, and poor Fred a year or two younger. And, if it seemed somewhat puzzling that young Hale should, as soon as Sir Charles arrived, begin to fall back into his old habits of running in to the Crescent, Jane did not doubt that it was jealousy which prompted these frequent visits.

It is probable that Frances had bestowed a few relenting smiles on her youthful adorer just then. On one or two occasions, when both the young men had come into the school-room during Jane's music-lesson, Miss Beauclerk had found that Sir Charles had a good deal to say to her, while Jane, at a little distance, was talking in a low voice to Fred. And the governess made Mr. Hale a graceful bow when it was time for her to go, and asked him gently why they never saw him now on music-lesson days.

That was quite enough for poor Fred. It was something to be in the same room for an hour with his goddess, even if that baronet-fellow was always hanging about and paying Miss Beauclerk all sorts of gay compliments. Of course, he meant nothing by them; he was engaged. But Fred was of opinion, and rightly, that Sir Charles West would have been better employed in making pretty speeches to his betrothed.

Jane was not at all jealous; unaffected and nice as she was, to her Miss Beauclerk was only her governess—somebody who had the right to scold her, and who could play the piano much better than she, but who seemed the last woman in the world for any one to fall in love with.

And if, during those long, whispered talks with Fred, which Sir Charles's presence in the school-room seemed to bring about so naturally, if during those talks poor Fred's mysterious allusions to an unhappy fate and unrequited affection were meant for stately Frances, who was smiling up at the young baronet, and not for his old friend and favorite, Jane, little Jane, was not to know this, but, on

the contrary, believed that the words were a veiled reproach to herself.

And the poor child fell into a habit of sobbing herself to sleep every night, and could hardly be compelled by her relatives, or by Lady West, to feign a decent interest in her *trousseau*.

So the days went by, and Sir Charles found that he was amusing himself very well indeed in Lowford. It was by his skillful maneuvering that Miss Beauclerk and her brother received a card for the grand dinner that was given at "the Crescent," as every one called old Fordyce's house, though it was only one of a dozen in that dull and respectable street.

No one took much notice of poor Henry, a sad looking young man, clumsy and plain, and wearing the old-fashioned dress clothes that had evidently been made before he had done growing. But Miss Beauclerk looked brilliant; she had made herself a charming gown of some cheap stuff—just suited to her station, as every one admitted—in which she outshone most of the provincial young ladies present.

Sir Charles West told her so distinctly more than once, and devoted himself in so marked a way to the handsome governess that Frances went home that night with a bright spot burning in each cheek, and eyes blazing with excitement.

"It matters could be arranged," she thought eagerly, as she sat up in her own room till the daylight came stealing through the leaves. "Why should not poor Jane Fordyce marry her old love? She has money enough for them both, and then— Sir Charles West is poor, perhaps, for a man in his position; but he comes of an ancient family, and with economy—"

But, before many weeks were over, Miss Fordyce became Lady West. Sir Charles had meant nothing by his philandering, it was quite clear; and Frances's smiles and Jane's tears had all been in vain.

"You will tell Fred, when I am gone, that I could not help myself," sobbed the little bride in Miss Beauclerk's ear. It was the evening before the marriage, and she had taken Frances upstairs to show her the wedding-gown. "I know he is unhappy, but if—if he would not speak out, what was I to do? How could I speak to papa?"

"I do not think Mr. Hale will mind very much," returned Frances coolly. "I am sorry to say that I had to refuse him yesterday for the second time."

It was her one piece of revenge; that, and her composed and smil-

ing face in the church on the morning of the marriage. Sir Charles could not help admiring her pluck and her beauty.

"But what is a poor beggar to do," he thought ruefully, "when a handsome woman gets a wrong notion into her head? She must have known I could not afford to marry for love, even if I had been guilty of that spoony sentiment toward her. Miss Beauclerk is very good fun to talk to; and a girl who has run the gantlet of two or three London seasons ought to have learned not to take every little thing a fellow says *au grand serieux!* How she holds up her head! By George, she was born to be a duchess at the very least!"

And so Sir Charles and Lady West drove away from the Crescent in a shower of satin slippers, and went to spend their honey-moon in Rome.

It was one of old Fordyce's stipulations—the manufacturer was very proud of his son-in-law, the baronet, and delighted in hearing his daughter called Lady West—that three months in the year should be regularly passed by the young couple at his house in Lowford. And, after the birth of a little girl, the only living child of the marriage, he clung more persistently than ever to the fulfillment of this condition. Sir Charles, while keeping within the letter of his contract, contrived to evade much of the dreary annual visit by repeated calls to Paris or London during the stated term—of course, on business. But Jane, who bore her honors very modestly, was glad to come home with her little daughter, whom Sir Charles called "Pussums," but who in her grandfather's house flourished under her real name of Clementina, which had also been her grandmother's.

Fred Hale had by that time set up in business for himself, and was already in love again. Jane felt an embarrassment in meeting him; she knew now how mistaken she had been as to the state of his feelings for her, and she was, besides, if the truth must be told, extremely happy in her new home, with a kind young husband, who had grown very fond of his sweet little wife, and with her pretty Pussums, who was the very image of that husband.

Poor Jane's happiness was not to last very long. When little Clementina was only three years old, her mother died in giving birth to a son. Young Lady West and her baby-boy were buried together, and then it was Sir Charles's mother who came with Pussums every year to spend the prescribed three months at the Crescent.

After the death of his young wife, Sir Charles West himself came much oftener to Lowford, being unable to endure a long

separation from his little daughter, to whom he was passionately attached, and who grew more winning in his eyes every year. Miss Beauclerk often saw him in church, or in the street. She never went to the house in the Crescent now. Time was passing. The pupils she had taught were grown up, and married; while she and her brother still lived in their old red-brick house, almost forgetting to wish for a change.

How many times had the lilacs budded and bloomed and faded since that first spring, when she had put bits of the blossom in the belt of her mourning-gown? And how many winter nights had the old lamp that swung in the gateway been lighted, and cast its shadow on the flags, and glimmered dimly across her bedroom window, and in the branches of the old trees overhead? How many years was it since Lord Wastelands had left her; since her father lay, staring dreadfully upward, on the library floor; since William Vanbrugh went away to New Zealand? Sixteen—seventeen—eighteen.

Miss Beauclerk flung William Vanbrugh's letter down upon the table, as if she had been stung, and walked back with a kind of fierce appeal to the narrow strip of looking-glass.

Was it—could it really be—eighteen years ago? Had she indeed left youth and all its dreams and possibilities so far behind? She looked at herself again. There were the masses of fair hair, the large hazel eyes, the little proud nose and arched mouth, that had won her the title of a beauty at her first ball. There was the lithe upright shape, which her cheap well-fitting gown displayed to perfection, though there was no one to see it but Henry.

"When a woman is married she is still young at five-and-thirty," Frances Beauclerk said to herself, with a superb movement of her small head. "And I am still young, though I am single. I do not look my age in spite of all I have gone through. What man seeing me to-day for the first time would dare to call me 'an old maid'? No! William Vanbrugh has come back, and he will not find me so greatly changed, though it is eighteen years since he went away."

She bit her lips to redden them, and smiled deliberately into the dingy glass.

"How do you do, Mr. Vanbrugh?" she said, under her breath, rehearsing the meeting with her old lover. "I am glad to see you in England again; it seems only the other day you went away!"

The animated face she saw nodding back at her, and arching its white throat, did certainly warrant the flush of satisfaction that rose to Miss Beauclerk's cheek at sight of it. With the aid of a little

dress, a little trouble, she felt that she was still capable of looking no more than twenty-eight. She had had her own share of troubles, it was true, but they had not been the wearing, aging troubles of women with husbands and children to drag them down and make them old before their time.

"There are compensations in life, after all," she thought, still flushed with the excitement of that last look in the mirror. "The women who married at the time when my engagement with Wastelands was broken off are settling down now into middle-aged dowdies, and letting their figures go to rack and ruin. They have had their life but mine is still to come!" Miss Beauclerk turned from the mantel-piece and began to walk about the room, beating the palm of one hand against the back of the other. "I have never been so poor, or so unhappy, that I have forgotten that; or ceased to believe in my future, or failed to take good care of my health and my looks. Wasn't it Déjazet, the actress, who used to say that it was a pity we did not come into the world old, and grow young, so as to have time to make an ample provision for our best days? That is what I have done! I am younger to-day in many ways than when William Vanbrugh went away. I have my youth yet to spend. And now—now he is coming back! He has not found it possible to forget me, in spite of his long silence. And I too, have I not remembered him?"

It seemed to Frances Beauclerk now, in the first glow of her new hope, that she had been mourning for Will Vanbrugh ever since he went away. She forgot the engagement into which she had entered a year after he sailed; she forgot her dreams, later, of becoming Lady West; she remembered only that he had written, that he must love her still, that his return to England opened up to her the prospect of a release from this monotonous genteel poverty in which she and her brother were bound as if with chains; of her yet living a woman's life to the full, and of being lifted again to the level of those who had abandoned and looked down upon her. Of course William had made money. What do young men go to such places as New Zealand for, except to make their fortune?

The door opened, and her brother came in. His hair was rough, his eyes looked tired, as if he had hardly slept at all. Frances ran to meet him, smiling and flushing like a girl.

"Oh, Henry," she cried, "there is a letter for you! From whom do you suppose? You will never guess, I am sure!"

Henry smiled absently, and went over to take his place at the table, having put his hands first on his sister's shoulders, and

kissed her on the forehead. He did not notice the letter by his plate, but took up the newspaper instead.

"Oh, Henry—look at your letter first!" flashed out Frances, not without indignation at his indifference. "It is from William Vanbrugh! He has come home—he is in England!"

"William Vanbrugh?" repeated Henry, evidently puzzled.

He looked blankly at his sister's moved and sparkling face. Frances made a little gesture and sound of patient impatience. Henry was apt, at times, she knew, to forget the people he had met, and the events that had occurred before—before that foolish affair of his with little Melissa Garth.

"William Vanbrugh, who was in papa's office," she explained, with an evident determination to be calm; "and who went away to New Zealand when I refused him—don't you remember?"

"Yes, to be sure!" cried Henry, kindly enough now. "And he has come back, you say? Why, Frances, he has been faithful, indeed, after all these years!"

"I don't know." Her face changed. "The letter is for you, Henry. Here it is—see!" She took it up, and put it into his hand, and pulled away the newspaper with a smile. "While you read it, I will pour out your tea."

As she did so, she kept her eyes eagerly fixed upon her brother's face. She helped him to the simple dishes on the table; and then, unable herself to touch anything, she pushed her plate away, that she might lean forward on her arms, and await the confirmation of her hopes with as much patience as she could command.

Outside was the silent sunny court, with its cool shadows and fluttering leaves. Some one passed along the flags and through the gate, which fell to with a clang; sparrows were chirping and twittering on the sill of the open window; there was a smell of flowering lilacs in the air. Inside was the prim little room, with its spindle-legged chairs and tables, its faint suggestions of *pot-pourri*, its engravings of Princess Charlotte, and poor, heavy-looking Henry, spelling out his letter with a great frown over his shaggy eyebrows.

"Well?" Frances said breathlessly, as he turned over the last page, and she saw his eyes traveling slowly downward. "Well, what does he say?"

Henry Beauclerk finished the letter to the last word, then turned it slowly over, as if seeking some line further. There was nothing; and he laid it down, keeping his hand on it, and looking absently out of the window.

"I don't know what you will think of it," he said at last, with-

out turning his eyes on his sister. "He—he does not speak of you at all, Frances."

A chill ran through her veins; all the transient color and buoyancy faded from her face.

"Then what does he write about, pray?" she demanded curtly.

"About his daughter!"

Frances drew herself up at the abrupt words as if he had offered her a personal affront.

"His daughter?" she repeated. "William Vanbrugh's daughter?"

"Yes. He tells me that he married within three months of his landing at Dunedin, and that he has a daughter sixteen years old. His wife has been dead for many years."

The woman started up, trembling all over, and held out her hand for the letter. While she had been remembering William Vanbrugh, she wildly thought, and repenting of her cruelty to him, he had forgotten her within three months, and had married, and had a child born to him. And now, instead of the returning lover she had expected at sight of his letter, there was only this careless confession of his infidelity; not a word for her—not an allusion to the past.

The revulsion of feeling was too great, too sudden; and for once in her life Frances Beauclerk broke down, and burst into a passion of bitter sobs and weeping.

Henry looked up startled.

"I—I did not know you would care so much, Frances," he stammered, not unkindly. He was, in truth, unaccustomed to any display of feeling on his sister's part. "And perhaps he is—perhaps he still cares for you. But he talks only of his little girl; he says that he means to bring her to see us. He has had some trouble in finding us out, or they would have been here sooner."

Miss Beauclerk was already controlling her tears, and her face; only the trembling of her hands, now, showed how much she had been moved.

"I am very absurd," she said, resolutely drying her eyes, and forcing her pale lips into a smile. "You took me a little by surprise, that is all, and I believe I was always rather sorry for William Vanbrugh. Go on, Henry. What about his daughter? What can he have to say to you about her, pray?"

"He wants us to take care of her, when he goes back New Zealand," answered Henry, puzzled. "He does not know what a dull home this would be for a child of sixteen!

Miss Beauclerk's fine lips grew compressed.

"That is hardly the point," she said, completely mistress of herself once more. "And pray by what right does Mr. Vanbrugh make such an unheard-of request? Why should we, of all people in the world, be expected to assume so unwelcome a responsibility as the charge of his child?"

"Perhaps you had better read the letter," suggested Henry, with a sigh. He did not care to enter into any argument with his sister. "He tells me that he will explain things more fully when he sees me—that he is compelled to go back for a few months to wind up his affairs, and that as he will be traveling about—you see—" Poor Henry was stammering more and more. "He knows no one else that he can appeal to, and—and I suppose he thought you would feel kindly toward his daughter for the sake of old times. If you had accepted poor Will, Frances, you might have had a little girl like her by this time."

The blood rushed to Frances's face.

"I did not accept Mr. Vanbrugh," she said curtly.

"No; but—"

"You will write a line before you go to the office," decided his sister, putting aside all remonstrance with a wave of her white hand. "You will remind Mr. Vanbrugh of the change in our circumstances; he is evidently aware of it, or he could not have addressed his letter here—and you will decline in my name and your own the preposterous charge he seeks to impose upon us. It is certainly the coolest proceeding of which I have ever heard."

"Very well," Henry answered indifferently.

He was thinking of the times when he and William Vanbrugh were lads together, and rowed in his boat on the Thames; and of how poor old Will used to rave about Frances and her beauty and girlish cruelty. Will was cured of his pain now, and had his heart full of another love; and—he—Henry—was only a dull middle-aged man, having no one to care for and nothing to live for but the necessity of eating and being clothed. How strange and sad a thing life was!

"Write in a way that will end the correspondence," said his sister calmly. "I have no desire, in the circumstances, to renew our acquaintance with Mr. Vanbrugh."

"If you do not care to let him come and see us, I can at least go and see him," Henry answered, with some bitterness. "We were friends once; it is not a great deal to do for him."

"Traveling costs money," replied Frances calmly. "My dear

Henry, don't be sentimental, I beg of you. You had forgotten William Vanbrugh's very existence until I recalled it to you this morning. Pray don't make your old friendship an excuse for a few days' absence from the office."

Henry colored darkly; and, without another word, sat down to write his letter. Frances rose too. She had her lessons to give presently. She was not one to allow her private feelings to interfere with business. Her handsome face had quite recovered its usual tranquillity. The future she so steadily believed in was again deferred—that was all. But with this thought was mingled a bitter sense of resentment against the man who had so soon forgotten her. She was vexed with herself for having wasted an hour over such unprofitable anticipations concerning a man who was henceforth no more to her than that other unknown William Vanbrugh whose name she had read last night among the list of the injured passengers by the Western express.

"It was not even worth his while," she said to herself angrily, "to send me a word of remembrance in his letter."

She paused as she was about to leave the room, and took up the letter which her brother had left by his plate. The handwriting was firm and bold enough, and showed none of those traces of agitation which had disfigured poor Will's last hurried scrawl from Liverpool.

"I want you to see my little girl, Henry, old fellow," was the unlucky passage her eye fell upon. "Cherry and I have been waiting till she was done with school for good to come home and see the old country together, and the old friends. Cherry and I have heard with regret, my dear Henry, of the change in your fortunes. We should be very glad if we could in any way pay our debt of gratitude to the son of the man who was good to me when I was a lad beginning the world. Cherry sends you her love. Now that I have got her back again, and see how sweet and good and pretty she is, I think it was great waste of time to send her to school. Cherry says—"

Cherry, Cherry—nothing but Cherry! Miss Beauclerk laid the letter down again, and her fine lips were scornfully curved.

"Have you finished the answer?" she asked of her brother, rising and going to the glass to smooth her hair and to see whether the traces of her unwonted emotion were dying away; and she went on unmoved, hearing the parlor-door open. "Yes, Susan, you may take away the breakfast things, and don't forget to tell me when the butcher comes."

There was no answer; and Frances, looking round with quick

displeasure, saw that it was not Susan who had come into the room, but a girl dressed in black, who looked at her with startled dark eyes.

"Are you Miss Beauclerk?" she asked.

Frances bowed. A certain unwelcome conviction blanched her cheeks as she saw the sweet little frightened face under the country bonnet.

"You don't expect me, I know," faltered the child; "but I had to come; papa made me promise. I am Cherry Vanbrugh;" and she burst into tears.

Henry Beauclerk sprung up from his unwritten letter and advanced with shy and clumsy cordiality.

"Are you Will's daughter?" he said, holding out both his hands; and little Miss Vanbrugh, looking up at the young man's ugly compassionate face, held out both of hers too, and begun to cry afresh as she felt the kindly pressure of his big palms.

"How do you do?" Frances said with chilly politeness. "Pray sit down. Have you had breakfast?"

But Cherry, unheeding her, continued to sob and to cling to Henry's hands. The poor fellow felt thrilled and touched by the little trembling fingers. Something in the girl's face and slender shape reminded him vaguely of his gentle lost sweetheart. He drew her closer and muttered some stammering words of consolation.

Miss Beauclerk watched them both with coldly angered eyes. It was not William Vanbrugh's daughter she saw—not the child of the man who had once loved her better than all the world, but the personification of the many years that had elapsed since their parting, of her own unwedded maturity, of the futile dreams which had known no fulfillment, of the latest bitterest disappointment she had just endured. Frances was conscious of a slowly-awakening hatred as she looked at the pretty sobbing maiden and watched her brother's kindly but uncouth attempts at comforting her. Then suddenly she became aware of the child's black frock, and a chill suspicion of the truth darted across her, shaking her for the moment out of her invulnerable armor of selfishness.

"Mr. Vanbrugh—your father!" she cried hurriedly. "He is with you, of course?"

Cherry drew her hands quickly away from Henry's kind grasp, and turned to look at her questioner out of her dark and agonized eyes.

"Papa is dead!" she cried, with a fresh burst of grief. "Didn't

you know—haven't you heard of that terrible night in the train? Do you think I would have left him if he were alive?" And, as she spoke, she fell sobbing by a chair, and buried her face on her arm.

CHAPTER III.

In her heart of hearts, Frances Beauclerk, having recovered from the first painful surprise, told herself that William Vanbrugh deserved his fate. She was not very wicked; she was only very cold and very self-absorbed, and it did not seem unnatural or unlikely in her mind that he should be thus punished for his want of faith with her.

Her eyes were glittering coldly when, at last, little Cherry lifted up her tear-drenched face and looked round wistfully for poor old Henry. Miss Beauclerk felt that there was no time to be lost.

"My brother is obliged to go to the office in a few moments," she began, not unkindly. "Perhaps, Miss Vanbrugh, you will tell us the motive of your visit? Can we be of any service to you?"

Cherry looked at her with a wide, terror stricken gaze.

"I—I came to stay," she faltered. "Papa made me promise with his last breath—"

She did not cry now. Miss Beauclerk's bright hazel eyes were upon her, and her tears seemed frozen.

"To stay!" Frances echoed, drawing herself up. "My dear Henry, it will be as well perhaps if you attend to what Miss Vanbrugh is saying."

Henry had moved away, and taken up his hat, which he was turning round and round and polishing with much care against his coat-sleeve.

"It will, of course, be necessary for us to communicate at once with her friends."

"I have no friends!" Cherry declared piteously, as Mr. Beauclerk, with his usual obedience to his sister's hints, stopped polishing his hat and advanced. "Papa told me I was to live with you now. Didn't you get his letter? I"—the poor little lips were quivering again—"I posted it as soon as I found it among his papers, and then—when—when they took him away and I was left quite alone, the doctor and the clergyman told me that I had better come at once—and I did, though I had never traveled by myself before, and I was frightened."

Henry's lips parted eagerly, but a look from his sister silenced him before he could well speak.

"You won't send me away?" the little creature urged, pale with dread. "I am never any trouble; papa says so. And the clergyman told me that I would have enough money to live on and buy clothes with, so I need not be any expense, need I? Oh, Miss Beauclerk, your brother was my darling papa's friend; he often spoke of him to me. Don't send me away—please don't!" She clasped her soft little hands. "I will be a good girl and do whatever you tell me."

Miss Beaulcerk made an impatient gesture.

"This is hardly the moment for sentiment," she said quickly. "My brother and I, Miss Vanburgh, are hard-working people, and have presently to go out to attend to our respective duties. Let us understand this clearly. Have you no friends or relations at all in England—no one to whom we can write, and who can receive you into their house?"

"No." Cherry shook her head. "Papa and I tried to find some one that he knew, but they were all dead or gone away. Hardly any one remembered him in Norfield, where he was born—none of his relations lived there any longer. We saw the names of some of them in the church-yard."

The dark and childish eyes were filling up again. Henry pushed over an arm-chair, in which he made her sit. Her little shape in its mourning-dress seemed swallowed up by the big arms as she sat nervously clasping and unclasping her hands and looking into the faces of the two strangers, who were her only friends in the whole world.

"Your father had surely corresponded with his family?" pursued Frances, unflinching in her investigation.

"They would not write to papa after his marriage, because"—the girl hung her head a little—"because mamma was a house-maid, Miss Beauclerk."

"A house-maid?" The lady's clear cut lips began to curl again.

"Yes. She nursed papa in New Zealand when he had brain fever, and then they were married. I can not remember my mother, Miss Beaulcerk; but papa said that she was very sweet and good, though she was not born a lady. But papa's friends never forgave him, and they would never speak to me or let me go and see them; and now it is too late."

"Your mother's relations, then?" demanded Miss Beauclerk, with her brilliant wintery smile. It was not displeasing to her to

hear what manner of woman her discarded lover had married in his despair.

Cherry blushed and hung her head again.

"We could only find one," she faltered out—"my mother's brother. He keeps—a shop in London; but he has a great many children of his own, and is very poor. Papa would not take me to see him at all—not because he was poor—oh, no! Neither papa nor I would have minded that. Papa was once very poor himself; but —but because I had been to school and learned many things that my poor cousins did not know, and papa thought it would only be unpleasant for all of us to meet."

There was truth in every look of Cherry's dark eyes, and in every tone of her pretty anxious voice as she pleaded her cause.

"That may have been so," Frances replied, unmoved, "when your father was alive, and you had a natural protector. But now that you are alone in the world, surely your mother's relations are the proper people to receive you. I think, my dear Miss Vanbrugh, that you had better give me your relative's address, and allow us to communicate with him. Until we hear from him we shall, of course, do our best to make you comfortable here. But—"

"I am sorry," Cherry said, in a distressed whisper. "But I can not give you my uncle's address."

"You do not know it? Doubtless Mr. Vanbrugh's lawyer—"

"It is not that. I do know," admitted the girl, twisting her helpless little hands in her lap. "But papa desired me not to go. How can I disobey him now that he is—"

A fresh burst of sobbing finished the question, as Cherry hid her face in her hands, and rocked herself in uncontrollable agitation. Miss Beauclerk sat down, and waited, with a slightly irritated expression, until quiet was restored.

Henry had started and turned pale at sight of the child's grief, but he offered no further consolation, as he stood clumsily shifting from one foot to the other, and watching the two women from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"In other circumstances," his sister began, "I do not deny that you would act sensibly in remembering your father's wishes. But as it is"—shrugging her stately shoulders—"I ask you if you are justified in making any objection to the plan I suggest? My brother was about to write and explain how impossible it would be for us, in our quiet little household, to receive a stranger. I have no desire to appear impolite, but really—"

"I see," Cherry said simply, her lip quivering with shame and

mortification. "You do not want me. I am sorry, because papa died so happy, thinking that you would be good to me for his sake. But of course I can not stay now. I am sorry to have troubled you. I will not detain you any longer, but go back to Doviton, and consult Doctor Denbigh."

The child rose as she spoke, with the prettiest air of dignity. Her small dark head was about up to Miss Beauclerk's shoulder.

"Oh, pray do not make me out quite so ungracious as that!" replied Frances, smiling again. "I hope that you will consider yourself our guest, for to-day at least. If you will not allow us to communicate with your friends in London, you will at least consent to our writing to the doctor you mention, and making further inquiries into the matter?"

Cherry looked wistfully from Frances to her brother. There was a question in her dark sweet eyes as they met Henry's.

"Stay," he said abruptly, as if she had spoken it. "I must go now. My sister will make you comfortable."

Henry was an hour later than usual, that evening, in coming home from the office. His sister's face clouded over when dinner-time came, and he had not yet returned.

"Won't you wait for Mr. Beauclerk?" Cherry asked timidly, from the open window, as Frances prepared to take her seat and carve.

"I never wait dinner for any one," was the composed answer. "If Henry chooses to trifle with his digestion, I see no reason why we should suffer for his want of common sense. Pray take that chair, Miss Vanbrugh; I hope you have not been very dull all day? Unfortunately it is impossible for me to put off my pupils. I have had a hard day's work. I can assure you I have earned my dinner."

Cherry hesitated.

"Would you mind," she said wistfully; "I am not very hungry —may I wait until Mr. Beauclerk comes home?"

Frances stared a little.

"Certainly," she said, with an amused air, "if you prefer lukewarm mutton. Henry will be charmed, I have no doubt;" and she proceeded calmly to dine.

Cherry blushed, but was glad to have gained her point so quietly. In truth she had spent a most wearisome and lonely day, sitting at the window in her new black gown, with saddest memories for her companions, and looking out into the melancholy sunny court,

where only the sparrows in the ivy and the slow footfall of some one opening and shutting the iron gate broke the April silence.

She had found herself watching, toward evening, with some eagerness for Henry's return. She could speak freely, she felt, to him, and tell him the many vague plans for the future that had been drifting through her sad aching little head all day. And it seemed so hard to sit down and break bread for the first time under his roof without him. She had not touched the luncheon they brought her during Miss Beauclerk's absence; and she began now to feel very faint, but she waited bravely.

And, when Frances had left the room, the girl ventured timidly to readjust the table, and to set in its midst the huge nosegay of lilac and laburnum which kind Martha of the kitchen had brought her in from the grass-grown yard at the back of the house.

When Henry came home, looking tired and dusty, but excited too, and having a certain air of determination about him, he found, not the disordered table and chilled meats that usually awaited him when he was late, but Cherry, smiling shyly from behind her big bow-pot, and ready to dine with him off the hot soup that came in smoking.

"Do you mind?" she asked, holding out her pretty hand. "I waited for you, I was not very hungry."

Poor Henry's tired face brightened.

"I did not mean to be late," he said. "But now I am glad; it looks very pleasant, somehow Let me give you some soup, Miss Vanbrugh." He upset some upon the clean cloth in his eagerness.

"Please call me Cherry," said the child; and then Frances came rustling softly into the room.

"What has been the matter?" she asked brusquely. "Is there anything wrong in Conyngham Lane?"

"I don't know," Henry answered as abruptly. "I have not been to the office to-day."

Miss Beauclerk turned pale.

"Where, then, have you spent your time?"

Henry finished his soup, then he said—

"I have been down to Doviton to see Doctor Denbigh."

"Oh!" cried Cherry, dropping her spoon, and clasping her hands.

Frances was silent.

"I had a long talk with him," Mr. Beauclerk went on. "Poor Will had taken him, as well as he could, into his confidence at the last. And he agrees with me that Miss Cherry will be safer and

happier with us than with her relations in London. Besides, her father has appointed me her guardian."

Cherry uttered a faint cry of relief. Her dark sweet little face glowed gratefully out of the dusk.

"Am I not to be consulted then?" said Frances icily. She did not dare to assert her authority. She had seen the look on her brother's face; it was the same look that she had seen once before, and never forgotten.

"I don't see that any consultation is necessary," he replied. "What good can it do? Everything is settled."

"For the present, yes," assented Miss Beauclerk. "Pray finish your dinner, Henry; we will speak of this later."

"There is nothing to be said," he declared loudly, pushing away his plate and standing up, a clumsy, round-shouldered figure with gleaming eyes "Don't you understand, Frances, that this girl stays with us until she herself chooses to go away? Her father was my friend. It is our duty to look after her. And "—smiling bitterly—"she can pay you for all the bread-and-butter she eats."

Frances began to tremble, and again she was conscious of a swift sharp pang of jealous hatred.

"Miss Vanbrugh is well aware," she said, "that in our unfortunate circumstances—"

But Henry broke in impatiently.

"What does that child care about our poverty?" he cried. "When she finds a better home to go to, well and good; but until then she stays here. I won't have any more faces haunting us in the evenings. It is enough to have broken one girl's heart. I say I'll have no more of it!"

The poor fellow was plunging blindly up and down the small parlor in his excitement, knocking his broad shoulders and clumsy feet against the furniture, and speaking in abrupt broken sentences. Frances had not a word to say. She was indeed not a little frightened, and dreaded a repetition of the old escapade which, at the time, had nearly cost her brother his position in the house of Fordyce Brothers.

Little Cherry turned very white.

"Oh, pray don't speak unkindly to your sister on my account!" she pleaded, getting up and going over to poor Henry. "I will go away to-morrow if Uncle David will have me. Perhaps papa won't know where I am, and won't fret about it. It would be better for me to go than to cause any unhappiness in your home."

"You are not to go. Have not I said so?" cried Henry, stop-

ping in his stormy career to look at the child with the kind and melancholy eyes that little Melissa had found so sweet. "Frances, tell Miss Vanbrugh that she is very welcome."

"Pray stay with us, since it is better so," said Frances, pale-lipped.

And then Henry, having trodden upon the cat and knocked over a chair, went out of the room and appeared no more that evening. Cherry ran to his sister.

"Forgive me for coming here," she said, choking back her sobs. "How was I to know? I am very sorry. I will go away yet. You must talk him over."

"No," Miss Beauclerk said. "If you went away he would only follow you. He has got into one of his obstinate fits. Stay with us; we are very stupid people, and you will very soon tire of our life, but I suppose it can not be helped."

And Cherry did stay. And the lawyers paid every quarter a certain sum for her expenses to the Beauclerks; for it turned out that William Vanbrugh had left his daughter a little money, though he had evidently not succeeded in finding the "fortune" he had gone to seek in New Zealand eighteen years ago.

One evening, when Cherry had been living in Eden Row for a year, she went for a long walk with Henry, and came back with her hands full of primroses from the lanes outside the town. On their way home they passed through the Crescent, and saw Lady West's carriage standing at the door of Mr. Fordyce's house, and Lady West herself, who came out presently in a train and diamonds and a white shawl, to drive away to some dinner-party.

Henry told Cherry who the lady was, and how her son was a widower with one daughter, and how they always spent three months out of every year in Lowford. Cherry was staring up at the stars, and hardly heard him.

"Oh, Henry," she said, "the sky is just the color of my primroses!" And they walked on together to the simple supper that awaited them.

They were great friends now, and could always find a great deal to say to each other, though when Frances came into the room the talking would cease, and Henry would relapse into his usual moody way. He had found courage by some means to tell Cherry about poor little Melissa and her early grave away in Manchester. Cherry listened and pitied him with all her heart. The poor fellow felt soothed by having some one to look up to and admire him again, in

spite of his uncouth manner and ugly looks. Indeed Cherry had made him very happy. He was reading German with her in the evenings when the weather kept them in-doors. The girl had, with old Martha's help, cleared out a room that had been filled with lumber and odds and ends, and had made it into a splendid study for Mr. Beauclerk. He could sit and smoke there, and scrape away at his beloved violin unheard by Frances, who could not endure the sound; whereas Cherry grew very fond of the bits of melody in De Beriot's exercises, and would sing them softly to herself as Henry swung her in the swing he had put up for her between the two old elm-trees in the yard

The girl's dark hair floated on the breeze, her eyes shone, her cool muslin skirts flew backward and forward above her trim little shoes. Henry would never have stopped swinging her. It was she who used to remember that he must be tired, and beg him gently to rest. She had not many amusements besides her swing and her German lessons, only Martha's cat, and a few pots of flowers that she had bought one day from a man who was wheeling a barrow full of them through the court. The room smelled sweetly of Cherry's violets and lilies of the valley as Henry and she came back from their walk.

"Oh, Frances," she said gayly, "we saw Lady West going out to a dinner-party! She looked so grand! I have never been to a dinner-party; I wonder what it is like?" And she gave all sorts of fine names to the bread and cheese as Henry helped her at supper, and called the beer champagne, which only Mr. Beauclerk indulged in.

That was not to be the last, however, which she was to see of Lady West. The very next day it happened that she was waiting on the step of a shop for Miss Beauclerk, who was giving her careful orders inside. The sun was shining, and a soft little wind blowing, and Cherry was humming vaguely to herself, as she stood against a variegated background of lettuces and tomatoes and radishes, full to the very finger-tips of the enjoyment of her young blood and the brightness of the day.

She had no idea how charming she looked in her pink-and-white muslin gown and fichu, and her coarse straw hat lined with pink and trimmed with dog-daisies. Lady West was looking at her very admiringly, having just driven up to the door with Pussums and Pussums's doll and Skye-terrier in the roomy old carriage. Miss Clementina's blonde locks were streaming over her gay French-looking little garments, her eager eyes went looking up and down the

street in search of amusement, and so they happened to meet Cherry's, which smiled frankly back at them.

"Pretty girl, please come and look at my doll," cried Pussums, in her clear little pipe. "Come and scratch Fluff's ears; he won't bite."

Cherry smiled and nodded from her step, as the little girl leaned over the carriage door, dragging the reluctant terrier up so as to show his impertinent black nose and the falling fleece that hid his eyes.

"My darling!" remonstrated Lady West, to whom the dapper shopman was bowing from the pavement. But Pussums renewed her invitation in a still louder key.

"Pretty girl," she cried again, "come and kiss me!"

Cherry laughed then, and with great simplicity ran across to the carriage door, where she kissed the child a great many times, regardless of Fluff's excited barking.

Almost at the same moment Frances appeared, cool and dignified, purse in hand, from the interior of the shop. No one would have guessed, from her appearance, how small the order was for which she had just paid. Her face darkened with quick annoyance as she saw the little scene before her—Cherry and Pussums kissing each other over the carriage door, and Fluff's wriggling body, while Lady West graciously apologized for her grandchild's audacity.

"I think you must be Mr. Beauclerk's little ward," she was saying. "We saw you in church yesterday, Pussums and I. It is very good of you to indulge this naughty child." And then Lady West saw Frances, and made her a friendly bow. "It is some years since we have met," she said, in her kind, fussy old way; "but you see our children here are renewing the acquaintance for us. I hope you will shake hands with me, Miss Beauclerk."

Frances could but accept the proffered hand, but she had the air of conferring a favor as she did so.

"Cherry is inclined to do thoughtless things," she began a little severely; but Lady West stopped her with a smile.

"It was Pussums's fault," she declared. "Or perhaps Miss Cherry's sweet face was to blame. She is really a lovely child! At all events I am glad the introduction has come about, even in so irregular a fashion. Your brother, I hope, is quite well?"

"Gran-Gran," cried Pussums the irrepressible, "do make Cherry Vanbrugh come home with us to luncheon! Her name is Cherry Vanbrugh. Mine," she explained, turning now to Cherry, whose dark eyes were full of laughter—"mine is Clementina Fordyce

Pussums West, and Fluff's is—Fluff, and Dolly's is Mamzelle. Papa brought her from Paris. Papa is away now and I have no one to play with. Do come home with me, you pretty Cherry!"

"Will you spare her to us?" hazarded kind Lady West, while Miss Beauclerk stood stately and unsmiling.

Cherry looked at Frances wistfully. The day was so fine; Henry would not be home for hours and hours, and there was not much to see or to do in Eden Row.

"I am sorry that Cherry has an engagement for this morning," was Miss Beauclerk's answer. "I am afraid we are lingering too long as it is. Good-morning, Lady West."

"Good-bye," Cherry said then, her lip trembling. "I am sorry I can not go and play with you, Pussums! Good-bye, Fluff and Mamzelle!" She kissed the little girl on both cheeks, and then, to Miss Beauclerk's horror, held up her fresh face very simply to Lady West, who, surprised, but well pleased, kissed her very heartily, and patted her shoulder.

"Good-bye, my dear," she said gently. "Some other day, perhaps, Miss Beauclerk will spare you to us. You know we are in Lowford for two months longer. Good-morning, Miss Beauclerk; I am very glad to have met you. Home, James"—to the footman as he touched his hat; and so, with a little clatter and prancing of the horses, the carriage drove off, Pussums blowing kisses and waving her hand, and Fluff barking more excitedly than ever.

"Have I an engagement?" Cherry asked timidly, as she and Frances turned homeward through the sunshiny streets. "I did not know."

"Of course not"—with a calm smile. "But do you suppose I can allow you to make acquaintances in the street? Lady West had no right to ask you to luncheon as she did."

"But, you know her, don't, you, Frances?"

"I taught her daughter-in-law music at one time. Lady West has never called on me. There is no reason why she should. I was well paid by Mr. Fordyce for my lessons. I expected nothing more."

"I see," Cherry sighed. "What a funny little darling the little girl is! I told her about my swing. She says she has never been in a swing. I wish she might come and play with me some day."

Miss Beauclerk looked at the child with her cold bright stare.

"It sounds so absurd to hear a girl of seventeen talking of 'play-

ing,'" she said, laughing slightly. "When I was your age I had already refused an offer."

"That did for you instead of playing," Cherry returned, wistfully again. "You know I haven't any one to make me offers, or perhaps I should like that as well."

She told Henry that evening, as soon as they were alone in the cool elm-shaded yard, about her little adventure of the morning, and how much she had wished to accept Lady West's invitation.

She had expected him to sympathize with her in her disappointment, but to her surprise Henry looked as cold and as displeased as Frances had done.

"Why were you so anxious to go home with those strangers?" he demanded roughly. "Are you so tired of Eden Row, and of us already?"

The girl looked at him wonderingly.

"No indeed," she said sincerely. "I am very happy here, Henry. But—the little girl was so funny, and Lady West spoke so kindly, that I thought—"

"Yes—yes," he muttered. "You thought you would like to go and make friends with them—people who would forget you before they had left Lowford a week. That is the way of the world."

"I don't like to think that," pleaded Cherry, with a coaxing little face. "You would not forget me in a week, Henry, if I went away?"

"I am not in the world—the great world. Have not I often told you, child, how false and hollow the great world is—how it makes merry with you in your prosperity, and forsakes you in your need?"

"Yes." Cherry hung her head. The theme was indeed a favorite one with Henry, during their long and friendly talks. "But somehow—I don't know why, Henry—the world never really seems to me as bad as you make it out. I—I often think"—with a timid little burst of confidence—"that I should like to see it, and—and judge for myself, you know."

Henry broke into a bitter laugh.

"Of course," he said, "I might have known that you could not resist a few plausible words, or the sight of a fine carriage, any more than the rest of your sex. Oh, little Cherry, you are all alike—all alike!"

Cherry slipped a little hand under his arm, and laid her head against his shoulder in the pretty sisterly fashion that had grown upon her.

. . .

"Melissa did not care for fine words or carriages," she whispered gently. "Would you have said such unkind things to her?"

"Melissa!" Henry passed his clumsy old hand across his eyes with a kind of groan. "Melissa is an angel in Heaven! What has she to do with our miserable vanities and passions, my dear?"

Cherry rubbed her cheek softly up and down his coat-sleeve instead of answering. And in silence they took a few turns up and down the cool twilight yard, where the elms stood tall and black above them. Then Cherry spoke again. Her thoughts had evidently been dwelling on the meeting of the morning.

"Why does Sir Charles West stay away from his little girl?" she asked. "Is not he fond of her, Henry?"

"No doubt, after the fashion of his world. Ah"—with a second bitter laugh—"I see what it is, Cherry! You will never be satisfied until you have paid this visit. You will go and see these people, and come back discontented with us and our shabby surroundings. Well, I suppose it is only natural."

"Indeed it would be very unnatural," cried Cherry, firing up with generous indignation. "How could I forget that you gave me a home when I had nowhere in the wide world to go? How could I forget that you were papa's friend, of whom he often and often talked to me, when I did not know he was dying, and—"

"Cherry! Cherry—don't, my dear! I am a brute. You must not mind what I say."

But already she was gulping down her tears, and she looked up into his penitent disturbed face with a little nod and smile.

"I do not want to go to the Crescent," she declared, and then she corrected herself; "not very much, that is, Henry! But you ought to know, even if I did, that my heart has room in it for more than two people. Papa and you are there already, safe enough! So why should you mind my going to play with that little girl?"

She stooped to pick up a bit of lilac which had dropped from her belt, and when she looked up again, wondering at his silence, she found that he was gazing at her in a queer absent way, and that his deep-set eyes were full, under their shaggy brows, of an expression she had never seen in them before.

By way of making it up, if she had vexed him, she began to stick the flower into his button-hole; but he pushed aside her hands, almost rudely, and walked off without a word into the house.

Cherry felt a queer compassionate stirring at her heart. She followed him, and found him in the dusky little study, where he was sitting with his elbows on the table, biting his nails, and scowling

as he often unconsciously did when he was annoyed. The child went and knelt down by his knee.

"Henry," she whispered fondly, "why did you run away? Are you really angry with me? Don't you know that I would give up more than a visit to Lady West if you wished it?"

"Would you?" He turned round, and took her sweet little dark face in both his palms, looking down into it, pale and fierce. "Tell me that again! Say that you don't want to leave me! I can't let you go. These people have everything in the world besides—why should they want to steal you from me?"

"They don't, dear," Cherry answered gently. "Nobody really wants me but you. I dare say they will never think of me again."

She was greatly moved and touched by the poor fellow's distress, and very grateful to him for his affection. At one time she would hardly have believed it possible that she should care as much for him as she now did. His dark and ugly face had frightened her just at first. But she had grown used to that, and knew what gentle thoughts were hidden under his uncouth looks.

"Come out and give me a swing!" she whispered, in the little wheedling childish voice he loved. "I am going to stay with you forever and a day, Henry! But if you scold me any more I will just fly off above the elms, and never come back!"

He sighed and let go her hands. Then he rose and walked off to the swing, leaving Cherry to scramble up from her knees, and follow him as best she could

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CHAPTER IV.

Lady West did not forget Cherry. Only a day or two later she drove up to the old arched gateway of Eden Row, and made a formal call on Miss Beauclerk.

No one was at home, as it happened, but Cherry found the cards when she got back from her shopping with Frances, and she could not help jumping for joy.

"I am glad they have not forgotten," she cried, with an ingenuous blush, "though of course it does not matter. Perhaps they will not ask me to luncheon again. And if they do—I—I think Henry would rather I did not go to see Lady West. Does he dislike her, Frances?"

"He dislikes condescension to any member of his household," returned Frances composedly. "But I have no doubt Lady West will ask you to luncheon again, and that you will go."

Cherry hung her head. She was conscious of an intense desire to go—of an intense desire for almost any break in the tranquil monotony of her daily life. She was so young. It was stifling—kind as Henry was—to live with middle-aged people only; never to hear a laugh or a joke but her own. Cherry was ashamed of her secret longing, but she knew very well that it was there.

And before very long it was gratified. Miss Beauclerk returned Lady West's call with scrupulous politeness, taking Cherry with her; and Lady West, in her wish to please Pussums, took pains to anticipate all the civil evasions that occurred to Frances, and actually succeeded in keeping Cherry to luncheon.

Cherry gave a little gasp of pleasure as she found herself alone with Lady West, and saw Miss Beauclerk's stately figure pass by the railings on her way home. But, in a moment more, Lady West saw the young joy ebb fast out of her face.

"What is it, my dear child?" she asked kindly. "We will go up to the nursery now, and tell Pussums."

Cherry confessed that she was thinking about Henry.

"I forgot about him until this moment," she admitted, coloring with shame. "I promised him—I mean we were going to walk to the Out-lane this evening, and pick blue-bells, Lady West! I—I think I had better go—I can run after Frances."

"Nonsense, my love!" said the old lady, laughing kindly. "You can walk with Mr. Beauclerk to-morrow evening instead. I am sure he will not grudge you a little amusement to-day. Pussums will be wild with joy; and I know you must want your luncheon."

And so—sighing, reluctant, longing—poor little Cherry yielded.

Henry came home a few minutes earlier that evening. He had hastened his work in the office, and on his way home he had bought a pretty little basket for Cherry's blue-bells. He found only Frances in the cool lilac-scented parlor. She was making out her pupils' accounts, and told him briefly where Cherry was. Poor Henry's face began to scowl, but he took himself off without a word. Soon it would be dinner-time, she must be back by then, and he went and watched for her outside the door. People at the windows opposite saw him walking up and down, and hitting at the railings with his stick.

"They tempted her away," he was saying. "She did not want to go. She promised me."

After a while Frances came and tapped on the pane and told him that dinner was ready, but he took no notice. Then the maid came

and called him in, but he was watching the street along which Cherry must come, and heard nothing.

In a few moments he saw, not the little tripping shape that he was waiting for, but one of Mr. Fordyce's tall footmen, who touched his hat, and gave Mr. Beauclerk a note. It was for Frances, from Lady West. They had persuaded Miss Cherry to stay to dinner, she wrote. She was sure that Miss Beauclerk would forgive her, as Pussums really refused to be separated from her new playfellow.

"I recommend you to eat your dinner now," said Frances quietly; but Henry, taking up the little basket he had bought, turned away, and went out again. His sister heard the iron gate clang to behind him, and then his footsteps dying gradually away.

Cherry was at that moment helping to undress Pussums in the big airy nursery in the Crescent; a process which was delayed by Miss Clementina's efforts to make Fluff say his prayers. It was not until the pretty spoiled child had fallen asleep that Cherry could creep away, and then she went down-stairs and found Lady West in the drawing-room, and begged to be allowed to go home at once, without waiting for dinner.

"But, my child, I thought you said," began the lady. "I had set my heart on your dining with Mr. Fordyce and myself. We are quite alone, you know, and—"

"Oh, I must go!" repeated Cherry earnestly; and her dark eyes were full of tears. "I am sorry to seem rude and fickle, but I can't bear to think of Henry dining alone; I ought to have said so sooner, but—but I wanted to stay."

"You have been happy with us then, my love?" the lady asked, drawn irresistibly toward the pretty pale child. "I am glad of that!"

"Oh, I have been too happy, I am afraid, Lady West!" She lowered her voice in an earnest way—"Is this the World?"

"My darling child, what can you mean?" cried Lady West, puzzled and amused. "This?—what?"

"I mean this house—and you—and Pussums? Is this the great World? Or is it only in London?" The child's sweet dark eyes were fixed upon her friend's face in a little agony of doubt and suspense.

Lady West began to understand.

"What a sweet odd little creature!" she thought rapidly. "How Charles would be amused by her!" And she added aloud in a reassuring manner, "My dear little Cherry, we are only very plain old-fashioned people; you need not be afraid of us at all! Kiss me,

and promise me that you will come again; come very often, and play with Pussums?"

Cherry flung her arms warmly about Lady West's neck.

"Oh, you are very good and kind!" she cried, smiles breaking out again, in her relief. "I should like to come! I think Henry will let me, when he knows that this is not like London. Good-bye, dear Lady West, and thank you a hundred times for my beautiful holiday!"

Then Lady West's maid brought a warm little white cloak to tie on over Cherry's muslin dress; and, when she got into the carriage, she found a big box of French bonbons waiting for her with Pussums's love, and a bunch of roses like those she had admired so much in the great conservatory.

She could not enjoy the color and fragrance of her flowers, for thinking uneasily about Henry.

"I will give them all to him," she thought; "and my bonbons to Frances. I hope he will forgive me, and not put on his sad look!"

So she drove up in great state to the old gateway, where the lamp was already alight and glimmering among the thick-leaved ivy. She had expected to see Henry smoking his pipe at the parlor window, but there was no one there. The house looked dark and lonely—even Frances was out. She had gone to evening service, the little maid explained, at St. Mark's.

Cherry could not bear the look of the dusky silent room. There was nothing for her to eat, of course, though she had had no dinner yet. She had not the heart even to go upstairs and take off her best frock, as she ought to have done: so, wrapping the white cloak more closely round her shoulders—it felt like Pussums's little arms, she thought, and smelt like Lady West's roses—she went and sat down on the door-step, as she had often seen the neighbors' children do in the summer evenings. It was very still now in the old passage—all the children were in bed; the trees rustled sadly above her head, a star or two peeped out beyond the dusky chimney-pots, the sparrows were drowsily twittering in the ivy.

Not a footfall or a voice broke the evening silence. Cherry felt as if she had done something dreadful, and that no one would speak to her any more. The very lights in the opposite windows and the drawn-down blinds seemed to shut her out blankly from all sympathy or companionship; far off she could hear the murmuring echoes of the town.

It appeared to her that she sat there a long time. It grew dark

and chilly; she was very hungry and tired, but still neither Frances nor Henry came home. It was very seldom that Miss Beauclerk was so late. No doubt she had been carried off to the house of one of her pupils. Henry was the first to appear.

When Cherry saw him coming, looking very tired and walking very slowly, she sprung up with a sigh of relief, and began to cry.

"Oh, Henry," she sobbed, "I thought you would never come back! Are you angry with me? Come in and I will tell you."

He stood in the dusky street holding her hand and looking into the pretty tearful face with eyes full of melancholy kindness.

"No, I am not angry," he said; "it was quite natural."

"No, no! It was mean of me to forget my promise; but I did until I saw Frances going home, and then I could not bear to give up my day in the Crescent."

"I understand," he answered, very gently still; but the haggard look of his face and his dusty boots and clothes somehow struck a keen pang to Cherry's little heart. "You were right to go if you wished it, my dear. Why do you cry?"

"Oh, and it was so delightful!" the girl exclaimed, brightening a little under his kind words and hastily drying her eyes. "And Lady West wants me to go again, Henry. She says that they are not in the World; so I thought perhaps you would not mind; and I don't think she is false at all, dear. She gave me such delicious roses—red ones. They are all for you; I have put them in the study near your violin-case. Come and see them."

She began gently to pull him into the house, and then she saw the basket in his hand.

"What is that?" she said. "What a pretty little basket! Oh, Henry, where have you been?"

"I have been to the Out-lane for the blue-bells. Take the basket, Cherry; I bought it for you."

"Oh, thank you!" she cried, opening it and peeping in. "But —where are the blue bells, Henry?"

He colored and rubbed his hand across his forehead.

"Are they not in the basket?" he said, confused.

Cherry turned the empty basket upside down, and broke into a little laugh.

"Oh, you dear, stupid, kind, thoughtful, thoughtless old Henry," she cried gayly, crowning him with it, "you wanted me there to remind you to pick them!"

After that day the carriage from the Crescent was often to be seen standing at the old gateway of Eden Row. Lady West, who was

quite charmed with Cherry's simplicity and sweet looks, had persevered, with gentle well-bred obstinacy, in her invitations, and had even brought Henry himself to admit, ruefully enough, that the June days were long to be spent alone in their quiet house by a pretty girl of seventeen.

So long as Cherry was home again to dinner—a point on which the girl herself insisted—could it be other than a source of satisfaction, the lady continued, smiling, to him and to his sister that their young ward enjoyed during the day some of the amusement and companionship so natural to her age?

"We will take good care of her," she assured poor Henry, who scowled and blushed and bit his nails furiously, but could find not a word to say.

As for Frances, she was honestly indifferent on the point. She tried to think as little as possible about the girl who had been so unceremoniously left on their hands. First, because she avoided unpleasant subjects on principle, and next, because the additional income accruing from Cherry's presence under their roof was by no means to be despised. But, if she had cared to search her feelings, she would have known that she had never learned to forgive poor Cherry for being only seventeen, or for having eyes of so velvet a darkness, a skin as white as milk, and manners so winning that hardly any one could resist them.

So by degrees poor William Vanbrugh's little daughter began to feel quite at home in the handsome house where Pussums reigned with such absolute sway. The two children—Cherry was no better than a baby when she was with Clementina—flitted gayly about the brown old rooms and galleries with their shining oaken panels and faded Turkey carpets. They made up wonderful games with the cast-off finery in the garrets, they wove wreaths of flowers for their heads, and sung songs to the old school-room piano, which poor little Jane used so listlessly to thrum during her lessons with Miss Beauclerk. As the two young things played, the dead mother's face looked wistfully down from its great gold frame on the wall. A picture of her hung over little Clementina's cot too in the nursery. Cherry often looked at the sweet plain little lady and pitied her for dying so young. She got an idea into her head, as girls will, that her husband had been unkind to Lady West. She pictured poor Sir Charles as a kind of monster with black hair and fierce eyebrows.

Sir Charles's mother was delighted to know that with Cherry Pussums was happy and out of mischief. She was very busy just

then; there were the inevitable Lowford hospitalities to be gone through and to be returned. She had her hands quite full; and she was besides secretly uneasy about her son, whose absence was beginning to give offense to Mr. Fordyce.

Sir Charles had certainly put off his appearance in Lowford from week to week, in a manner that struck Lady West as being decidedly alarming. Even Pussums's little printed letters, full of eager messages and loving commands, failed to bring him down from town, where the season was then at its height.

Lady West felt that there was every cause for alarm. Her son had seemed to be smitten with a certain lady—a widow—during the winter. They had met her at almost every house to which they had been invited. Lady West did not approve of Mrs. Lancaster, pretty and elegant as she was. In her opinion, the coquettish widow was not at all the kind of mother that Sir Charles ought to give to their darling little girl. But at his age it was only natural, of course, that he should think of marrying again, and there was no doubt that he had been a little fascinated. Country-house life is so dangerous; it affords designing women so many opportunities.

In her increasing anxiety Lady West actually confided in old Fordyce, and suggested that the best way to find out what Sir Charles was doing would be to pay him a little visit in London unawares.

"It will be an excellent opportunity to take Clementina to the dentist, my dear sir," urged the harassed diplomate. "And you will see that we shall bring our dear prodigal back with us. He will never be able to resist little Clem's entreaties."

Old Fordyce grumbled a good deal, and wanted to know why the best dentist in Lowford could not be trusted to pull out Miss Clementina's little tooth. But, feeling as he did, that his annual festivities were shorn of their greatest attraction in the absence of "my son-in-law, the baronet," the old manufacturer was at length moved to consent to Lady West's plan.

"For one week, my lady, and no more," he declared bluntly. "If you are not all back by that time, I'll come and fetch you home myself."

A dreadful old man! But, for his favorite grandchild's sake, would it not be a pity to offend him?

Poor little Cherry was the only one who did not hear with delight of the proposed visit to London. Pussums chattered incessantly all day long of the many things she intended to do, and to see, and to buy, when she was once again at home with papa. Fluff wanted

a new collar, and Mamzelle, who was now engaged to Prince Charming in the story-book, must have a handsome *trousseau*.

"What a pity it is summer!" she cried to her playfellow. "There will be no pantomime to go and see. Don't you like pantomimes, Cherry-mine?" This was what Pussums called her friend; the little thing had a great fancy for inventing pet names.

"I don't know, dear," Cherry said, soberly shaking her dark head. "I have never seen a pantomime; I have never been inside a theater in my life!"

Miss Clementina gave a small gasp of compassion.

"Oh, you poor, poorest little Cherry-mine!" she cried, getting up to cover the pretty cheeks with kisses. "What an awful lot you have to learn!" And, as Lady West came into the room at that moment, the little child ran up eagerly.

"Oh, Gran-Gran, what do you think? Cherry-mine has never been to the theater in her life! She must come to London with us, and we will take her to one, won't we?"

Lady West smiled.

"Indeed," she replied, "that would be very pleasant for all of us if it could be managed."

But Cherry only shook her head again; she knew that it was out of the question.

"You dear little goose," she said to Pussums, heroically smothering a sigh, "what should I do in London? I am a country cousin. You would be shocked at the way I should stare at everything; I believe I should scream if I were to see the queen."

"I have seen the queen," said Clementina calmly. "Gran-Gran looks more like one when she wears her point lace. But it is quite settled, Cherry-mine. You are to go to London with us. If you don't go, I won't go; and I won't have my tooth out. I will cry and kick, and bite Mr. Alleyne's hand."

"My darling!" remonstrated Lady West in distress. "Cherry is quite shocked. I am sure you will be a good little girl and do whatever papa wishes."

"Yes, I will, if papa will do what I wish a little!" And then she put her little arms round the grandmother's neck and began to wheedle her.

Cherry's heart was beating fast, as she walked home that evening, attended by one of the tall footmen from the Crescent. What if such a beautiful wild dream should come true? Would it not be something to remember and to think of for the rest of her life? She

would see the world for herself then, and know whether Henry had described it aright.

It was with a great effort that she contrived to put away the remembrance of Pussums's idle words, and to be ready to meet Henry with a smile, and a flower for his coat, when he came home from the close and dusty office. But the effort was made. Nor did she give him a hint as to what was filling her dark eyes with dreams all that long June evening in the yard.

She had almost persuaded herself, when next she went to the Crescent, that she hoped Pussums had forgotten all about her sudden whim. But her heart gave a great thump when, as soon as she entered the house, the child came running to her with an eager declaration that grandpapa said she was to go, and that Gran-Gran would coax Mr. Beauclerk to say yes.

Pussums had stuck to her point with a pertinacity worthy of old Fordyce's grandchild. Old Fordyce himself, when appealed to by his small tyrant and idol, declared that he saw no reason why the lass should not go.

"She's got a sweet little face to take up among the bedizened frippery yonder," he said in his usual vigorous style. "If she wants a fifty-pound note to buy ribbons to set it off, she can have it from me! Those who are good to my little Clem, here, sha'n't lose by it. You take Miss Cherry, my lady, and I'll stand the ex's."

Lady West was only too willing, and she volunteered, having already been so successful in her Eden Row diplomacy, to obtain Beauclerk's consent. But Cherry, whose cheeks were burning hot, declared steadily that she must ask Henry herself.

"I am breaking my promise again," she thought, torn between her pity for the man who had been as a brother to her, and her inextinguishable longing for a little pleasure, movement, excitement. "But at least I will tell him so myself; I will not be a coward as well."

It was the hardest task, she found, that she had ever set herself. Poor Henry had come home full of another scheme to give her pleasure. They had granted him a few days' holiday from the office; his quarter's salary had just been paid; he actually proposed to Frances, some of whose pupils were already leaving town, that they should take Cherry to the sea-side. He had his plan all ready, and had calculated the expenses with a nicety that Miss Beauclerk herself could not have excelled.

Cherry hung her head guiltily while the subject was being dis-

cussed at dinner, and later—it was a rainy evening, and she was sitting with Henry in the small study—she told him, desperately, of Lady West's invitation, and of her desire to accept it.

"It is not because Pussums wishes it, or because it will please Lady West," the girl said bravely, but with burning cheeks. "It is because—oh, Henry, I can't help it!—I want to go myself! But you don't think I am ungrateful to you for thinking about Northport? You don't think I am not quite happy here with you? It is only for a week, you know, and then I shall be back again, and we will go on with Schiller. Say that you don't mind very much! I won't go at all if you look like that!"

For Henry had closed the book with a great thump, and sat staring at her, livid and dismayed.

"You will not go to the sea-side with us?" he blurted out. "You want to go away—with those strangers—to London?"

Cherry made an entreating little face.

"They are not quite strangers, Henry," she pleaded, her dark eyes filling with tears. "And—and I do like them. I can't help it."

He broke into one of his old bitter laughs.

"Then go!" he said. "Go by all means! They have taken you from me! I knew they would! They have everything their hearts can desire, and I had only you—but they have won you from me! May they—"

He checked himself abruptly, seeing the fright in Cherry's pale and pretty face. The girl stood up, trembling.

"Oh, Henry," she said, "you look dreadful! Do you feel ill? Let me get you a glass of water, dear!"

But the next moment, with an effort, he smiled at her, and brought the color back into her face.

"No—no, my little Cherry," he said, putting out his tender clumsy hand to stroke her hair. "I am not ill. Go, my dear, if you wish; only promise me to come back, and not to be afraid of me. There is no reason. I would rather die than frighten you!"

"Dear Henry!" The little thing nestled to him, reassured. "And you won't be lonely while I am gone? And you will water my mignonette for me, and write to me every day?"

"You will not care for my letters," said the poor fellow, a dark flush rising to his sallow face. "You will have Sir Charles West to amuse you. Most women find him very agreeable, I am told."

"That horrid man!" cried little Cherry. "Oh, Henry—for shame!"

So it ended, at the cost of a silent and heroic sacrifice on poor Henry's part, and of a few twinges of conscience on Cherry's, in Pussums having her own way. But there was no need of Mr. Fordyce's fifty pounds, as Miss Vanbrugh very simply explained to the old gentleman when he repeated his offer.

"I have plenty of ribbons, thank you, Mr. Fordyce," she said, not in the least offended. "Every quarter the lawyers send me some money—more than I can spend."

And she resolved that she would buy a splendid new watch and chain for Henry while she was away.

There was no Sir Charles in Brook Street to receive Lady West and her young visitor. He had been out of town, his confidential man explained, for three days—at Cowes, Clinton believed.

Her ladyship's letters and telegrams had, of course, been duly forwarded, and there was no doubt that they would bring Sir Charles home without delay.

"It is that Lancaster woman again!" sighed Lady West inwardly; and then she had to help Cherry in consoling Pussums, who was loudly crying for her truant papa.

They had luncheon at once, after which the carriage was ordered, and they set off to order Mamzelle's *trousseau*, and to see about Fluff's collar. All this important business took quite a long time to accomplish, and it was not till the time when Henry, down in smoky Lowford, would be walking home to dinner, that the carriage turned into the Park, and Cherry was given her first glimpse of the world of so many dreams and desires and warnings.

Lady West's relief was extreme when, in a perfectly appointed victoria, she espied Mrs. Lancaster, whom she had injuriously imagined as playing the part of siren down at Cowes. The pretty widow was profuse in smiles. Was there ever anything so fortunate as their meeting? A day later, and she would have missed dear Lady West. Lady West had just arrived in London? Only for a few days? Had no engagement? And Sir Charles was still away? She must positively come and dine with Mrs. Lancaster, and go and hear an act of "Mignon" afterward. Yes, and Miss Vanbrugh, too! They would be just a cozy little party. Was it really possible that dear Lady West's little friend had never heard an opera? She could not make a better beginning than by going to hear Nilsson and Capoul in "Mignon." How one envied Miss Vanbrugh her fresh impressions and her pretty country roses! And how much darling Pussums had grown! At seven then—just time

to rush home and dress; for Miss Vanbrugh's sake they must try to be in time for the first act.

Cherry was in a rapture. The Park alone, she thought, would have been enough to think about for one day; and now, here was this bewildering, beautiful, smiling young woman with the auburn hair and Paris costume, and winning air, and the opera to finish up with!

Lady West, as they drove home, was full of practical inquiries as to Cherry's dress, gloves, opera-cloak Was she sure she had everything she needed? And Cherry, secure in the remembrance of a fresh white muslin frock, declared that she had.

So it happened that, when Sir Charles arrived late that evening, there was no one at home, except his little sleeping girl in her cot, with faithful old Hannah stitching by her side. Sir Charles stooped down to kiss the little tranquil flushed cheek, and, as he did so, he told himself that he was surer than ever he had done rightly in running away from Blanche Lancaster, whom, though at times almost irresistible in her fascination and apparent devotion to himself, he could never picture as the mother of his little girl, or as good homely Hannah's new mistress.

He went off to his club to get something to eat, and then, not caring to follow the ladies to Her Majesty's, he came soberly home again to await his mother's return.

The night was warm—hardly a breath of air stirring the boxes of mignonette at the open window—and Sir Charles had already enjoyed quite a comfortable doze over the last number of the "Cornhill," when Cherry came running into the room in her little white cloak—her cheeks in a flame, her eyes in a glow—and almost fell over the sleeping figure in the arm-chair.

Sir Charles started up, laughing, apologizing, bowing.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" cried the child, in an absent way. Her thoughts were evidently far enough off. She was not embarrassed by the unlooked for apparition of the lazy, long-limbed young man in Lady West's drawing room. A great many men, young and old, had, during the evening, made their appearance in Mrs. Lancaster's opera-box, and Cherry supposed that it must always rain gentlemen in London. "Do you want to see Lady West?" she added simply. "She has gone upstairs to the nursery with Mrs. Lancaster. Mrs. Lancaster insisted on seeing Pussums asleep."

Sir Charles bit his lip and looked uneasy. Then he smiled and looked down very kindly at the charming girl in her white finery.

"It is very amiable of Mrs. Lancaster, I suppose," he said, and added after a moment's hesitation—"Has Sir Charles arrived yet, do you know?"

"No; not yet." Cherry was pulling off her gloves. She was still bubbling over with excitement. "We have been to the opera," she explained breathlessly, nodding up at him.

He arched his eyebrows with due respect for this important announcement.

"Oho," he said, "that is the meaning of this pretty white gown, is it?"

"Do you think it is pretty? I have not had time to think about it. Everything was so wonderful! I"—blushing now and smiling—"I have never been to a theater before."

"You don't say so!"

Sir Charles began to feel quite wide awake. What a sweet-looking child it was! And what a charming naïve manner she had! No wonder his mother had gone cracked about her, and could talk of little else in her letters.

"Yes," Cherry repeated seriously. "Oh"—clasping her hands in a little ecstasy—"I did not believe that anything in the world could be half so delightful! The lights, and the flowers, and the diamonds! And the stage, above all! The scenery and the music, and Nilsson with her poor little bare feet! Oh, how I longed to give her my shoes! Mrs. Lancaster said it was not real, and that she had very comfortable soles under her stockings, but I wish she had not told me." The child ran to the open piano, and began to play the "*Connais-tu le pays?*"

"Oh, you have been to hear 'Mignon'?" said Sir Charles, looking at her, amused, but kindly too.

"Yes"—still picking out the chords as she stood. "I used to play that air at school, but it wasn't a bit like it. What a stupid instrument the piano is! You poor old wooden thing"—she compassionately shook her sweet little dark head above it—"you don't know how little music you have in you!"

As she spoke, she sat down on the stool, and—the pretty absorbed face being thus hidden from Sir Charles by the open desk—he followed her across the room, and stood leaning his elbows on the piano, and watching the girl's unconscious air. She was still playing, trying now to get at a bit of the dance-music, with less skill than enthusiasm.

"Where is the story supposed to take place?" she said, looking

up at him with her dark direct gaze, and frowning a little in her earnestness about the chords.

"In Germany, I believe."

"It really did happen, didn't it?"

"'Mignon'?" laughing. "I should be inclined to doubt it. You know the story is taken from Goethe's—"

"No." She made a pleading little motion of the head and shoulders. "Please don't tell me! I like to think it is true. I am sure it must be, or they could not be so much in earnest."

She went on playing and humming to herself. Sir Charles laughed again, but he sighed too. He looked very tired, and handsome and indulgent.

"I wish I could feel like that again!" he said.

"Like what?" She looked up surprised, still humming the air, and beating out the accompaniment.

"I mean—I wish I could believe in plays, and stories, and all that sort of thing."

"Don't you like to go to the theater, then?" Cherry asked, eying him with a solemn compassion.

"I am afraid I am a little tired of it. It is always the same, you know. One gets to know the tricks of the trade."

"Tricks!"—indignantly. "Why, do you think they are tricks? I am sure Capoul was really in a rage when that dreadful man was going to strike Mignon. I saw his eyes flash. And how kind and gentle he was with her afterward! Oh, I shall always like him for that! I am sure he would do the same for any poor girl who was in trouble."

"Oh, youth, freshness, spring-time, white muslin frocks!" thought Sir Charles. "What a treat you are after the knowing, weary London women one meets every day! What a delicious child this is! And how one envies the fortunate fellow who is one day to set her heart beating for something a little more real than a stage-hero! Her first love will be as great a surprise to her as her first opera. How frightened she will be, poor child! And how adorable!"

"There was only one thing I could not understand," Cherry broke in. "Why was Mignon jealous of Filina?"

"Because, I suppose, she is in love with Wilhelm from the first, and Wilhelm, not knowing, amuses himself by flirting with Filina."

"Is that flirting?"—seriously. "I am glad I shall never be a flirt. But—are people always jealous when they are in love?"

"I believe so. Aren't they?"

"I don't know." The girl's face clouded. "Oh"—to the piano, with a final crash—"do hold your tongue, you stupid thing! You are not a bit like Nilsson's singing!" She rose and went back to the table, where her gloves and the "Cornhill" lay near the shaded lamp. "Perhaps I had better go and tell Lady West that you are here?" she said. "Mrs. Lancaster is going to stay to supper. We are all hungry, she says, because we dined so early."

"I hope you agree with Mrs. Lancaster?" Sir Charles was smiling again, and looking very gentle and handsome, and very much amused. "But pray don't take so much trouble for me. I will wait until the ladies come down, if you will talk to me a little. I think you must be Miss Vanbrugh? I have heard a great deal about you from Lady West."

"Oh, have you, really?" Cherry smiled and colored. "She is so kind. I am very fond of her, and of Pussums. It was so very, very good of them to bring me with them."

"I hope you will like Sir Charles, too, when you know him."

Cherry shook her head.

"I don't think I shall," she returned coldly.

"Why not?" The young man was decidedly taken aback. "Have you ever met him?"

"No. And I suppose"—looking a little guilty—"I suppose I ought not to have said. I—I forget sometimes to pretend about things. I have no doubt Sir Charles West is very"—she paused, vainly searching for some adjective which should not involve too great a sacrifice of the truth, and then Sir Charles, coming good-humoredly to the rescue, changed the subject, and began to talk about her playfellow, the little child who was so dear to him, and whom he had not long before kissed in her sleep.

Cherry's kindling face and unaffected warmth were not to be misunderstood. But her artful companion continued his nefarious designs.

"Miss Clementina is a spoiled baby, I am afraid," he suggested, with hypocritical gravity.

Cherry fired up immediately.

"Indeed, she is no such thing!" she declared, with soft vehemence. "You must remember that she is an only child, and has no mother, poor little darling! And then she is so funny, and so lovable, that no one can help spoiling her a little. But it does her no harm. Pussums is very sensible, and very generous. She always takes other people's parts, and— Please don't say anything against Clem to me!"

Before Sir Charles, well pleased, could answer, Lady West was seen coming into the room followed by Blanche Lancaster in her long embroidered gown.

"Cherry, my love," said grandmamma, "Pussums begs to be allowed to kiss you now that she is awake. I am afraid we disturbed her, but—" At that moment she caught sight of her son. "My dear Charles!" she cried joyfully. "When did you arrive? Why did not they tell me? Here is Mrs. Lancaster. I see you have been making friends with Cherry. She—"

But Cherry had already flown from the room, and was half-way upstairs to the nursery.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she was thinking, with burning hot cheeks. "How can I ever go down-stairs, or look Sir Charles in the face again! After the things I said about him! Oh, why didn't I hold my tongue; and why didn't he tell me who he was! Oh, Henry was right, after all. The world is full of deceit and trouble, and it is beginning already for me!"

"What is the matter, you pretty Cherry-mine!" murmured Pussums drowsily. "Your cheeks are like two red roses! Oh, why does not Charley-boy come to his own wretched, wretched Clementina?"

"Papa will be here early in the morning, you will see," said Cherry soothingly. She was afraid to confess that he had already arrived, lest Pussums should insist on going down-stairs in her little night-gown. "You go to sleep, and the night will pass so quickly. It will be morning before you know it."

"Well, kiss me, then—just there"—pointing to her dimpled neck. "I want you to take away the taste of Mrs. Lancaster's kisses. Why does Gran-Gran make me behave so politely to her? I hate her awfully!"

"Never mind, darling," murmured Cherry between her kisses. "Only go to sleep now, and I will sit by you, and hush Mamzelle off in my arms. Poor Mamzelle—she is very tired; she can hardly keep her eyes open."

"She is thinking of Prince Charming," declared Pussums, yawning. "I shall be heartily glad when the wedding is over, and she is off my hands. I won't have any engaged dolls again—it is too much trouble. Good-night, Cherry-mine. I love you—and Gran-Gran—and Charley-boy—and—"

Old Hannah carried off the light, and Cherry sat down by the cot, with the doll in her lap, and an arm round Pussums's neck. As the child drifted off again toward the land of dreams, poor Cherry's thoughts returned to her disastrous meeting with Sir

Charles, and to the bad opinion she had expressed of that gentleman to his face. But how was she to suppose that that was Sir Charles West—that handsome man with the close-cropped curling fair hair, and the gentle fawn-colored eyes, with a kind of laugh in them all the time? He did not look a bit like a widower, or like what Cherry had pictured him in her own mind. He had always seemed black and disagreeable enough in the photograph-books at the Crescent; she had always felt sure she should detest him, but now—

Cherry's cheeks began to burn again.

"How rude I was!" she thought distressfully. "And he is not disagreeable at all. Quite the contrary. It is no wonder Pussums idolizes him so."

When presently a servant gently knocked at the door, and said that Lady West begged Miss Vanbrugh to go down-stairs, Cherry felt that she would rather have been sent to bed supperless—rather have done anything than meet Sir Charles again; but of course sooner or later it had to be done.

Sir Charles was sitting by Mrs. Lancaster near an open window, listening rather absently to that lively lady's chatter. He sprung up as Cherry entered, hanging down her head, and went to meet her, holding out his hand.

"I hope you will shake hands with me, Miss Vanbrugh," he said very gently, "just to show that we are friends, and that you are not vexed with me for making your acquaintance in disguise. I don't know what put it into my head; and I went on getting deeper and deeper in the scrape. Do you forgive me?"

"Indeed I do," Cherry answered frankly, blushing and breaking into a laugh in spite of herself, "if you will forgive me. I am afraid I was very rude. You know I really did not think that I should like you, but I do."

Mrs. Lancaster laughed at this confession, but Sir Charles heard it with a grave bow.

"I am glad," he said, imitating the child's simplicity. "For Pussums's sake it is important that you and I should be friends."

So Cherry and he shook hands, and then they all sat down to supper.

Cherry thought it was the happiest hour she could remember since her adoring and indulgent father had left her alone. Sir Charles's jokes and ready laughter filled the young girl with delight. Mrs. Lancaster too was all smiles and animation; and Lady West was always happy when her son was with her. How pleasant it was to

be with people who were happy! the girl thought; and then, swift upon the thought, there followed a remorseful pang, as she remembered poor kind moody Henry all alone in Eden Row.

"He can not help being gloomy," she thought loyally. "He has so little to make him happy. But oh"—sighing—"I do like the world. I should like to live in it always, if it is always like this?"

Cherry went to bed with visions of more pleasure for the morrow floating through her excited little head. Of a water-party on the Thames—Sir Charles's suggestion—of Hampton Court, and Bushey Park, and—

"How kind he is!" she thought as she took off her white frock, and let Hannah brush out her long dark locks. "I am very, very happy here! And I have only six more days! I must go home then—"

Again the remorseful twinge came stealing across her pleasure.

"No matter!" she decided, bravely. "I shall remember this beautiful bright week all my life. And Henry is kind too—kindest of all! I shall be very glad to go back to him, and to our German, and the swing, and my mignonette. But—but I do like Sir Charles. I am sorry I ever thought such hard things of him."

CHAPTER V.

BEFORE three days of Cherry's holiday had passed, Sir Charles West proposed to MRS. Lancaster.

Blanche laughed at him, though there was perhaps a tinge of bitterness in her laugh.

"Now what on earth induced you to do such a preposterous thing!" she remonstrated, as her suitor sat before her in her tiny shaded drawing-room, holding his hat on his knees, and staring moodily past her into the flower-laden balcony, with its striped awnings and china pots. "Have you by any chance mistaken me for Miss Vanbrugh, Sir Charles? It is a flattering mistake! Cherry is eight years younger than I am, more's the pity."

The gloom deepened on his face.

"Is it in that way," he asked, "that ladies usually receive the offer of a man's hand?"

"No," she admitted temperately. "At least, I can only speak for myself, of course. But then I don't remember having been proposed to before by a man whom I knew to be over ears in love with some one

else. That is an affliction I have hitherto been spared, though I have the misfortune to be worth two thousand a year. Oh"—with a pretty and deprecating gesture—"pray don't scowl, Sir Charles! I am perfectly well aware that you are not thinking about my money at all. Why should you? You have plenty of your own. No! Do let us talk sense. I won't marry you, so that point is settled; but I don't mind telling you that a week ago I was beginning to think that I liked you very much—"

"Blanche!" murmured Sir Charles gratefully, and he attempted to take her hand; but the fair widow put them both behind her.

"Don't interrupt me!" she cried, with a little imperious air that sat very well upon her undeniable charms. "I like you still, if that is any consolation to you, but I would not marry you, or any man, unless I were convinced that he loved me twice as well as I loved him. To be loved is so much less troublesome than to love; isn't it, Sir Charles?"

He moved uneasily in his luxurious chair, and fell to pulling his mustache. He was not quite sure whether the lively Mrs. Lancaster were chaffing him or not.

"Now you know very well," she went on over her embroidery, "that you are very far from feeling such an absorbing sentiment for me, old friends and comrades as we are; so I ask you again what induced you to make this absurd offer? Your mother does not approve of me, and she is quite right; trust a mother's instinct to find that sort of thing out! I should have made you a decently good wife, I dare say, as wives go, and given you your own way a great deal. But"—the lady shook her fair head gravely—"I should have fallen out with Pussums twenty times a day. Oh, I should! It is that very point which has made me hesitate many a time these six months! I have been trying to persuade myself that I liked children, and I have signally failed. Clementina and I would have been jealous of each other, and a nice time you would have had between the two of us, poor fellow!"

"Blanche—will you try?" persisted Sir Charles, the old half-reluctant fascination, which a later feeling had superseded, beginning again to stir in his veins. It must be conceded that Lady West's son had not much force of character where pretty women were concerned. "I don't believe you half mean what you are saying! You—"

"Because I don't curl my lip, or tear my hair, or indulge in a mocking laugh? Oh, the delightful transparent vanity of you eligible men! My dear Sir Charles, I mean much more than I am

saying. I mean that I have no mind to let you make a fool of yourself, and of me, and that I appreciate the compliment you have just paid me, as much as it deserves, and not one bit more!"

"Really, Mrs. Lancaster—" Sir Charles was blessed with an exceptionally sweet temper, but it did seem to him that the charming widow was a little hard upon him.

"And really, Sir Charles," she echoed, without looking up from her work. "It is Miss Vanbrugh you must marry, and not me—there now! Don't say that I am not your friend still, though I won't be anything else."

"If you are my friend, Blanche," he pleaded, "take me and marry me, and see how good I will be to you. But don't tell me to be selfish, and so—so ridiculous as to want to tie that seventeen-year-old child to me, an old fogy of a widower with a daughter whose playfellow she is."

"Exactly; and if you marry Cherry, they can go on being playfellows ever after. She is seventeen, you say, and you are—what? Four or five-and-thirty, I suppose? Sir Charles, let us have no mock-modesty, please. The difference in your ages is just nothing at all. Indeed, I am not sure that Cherry is not a little bit in love with you already."

Sir Charles jumped up with an ejaculation and went to the window, where he stood drumming on the panes, and staring fiercely into the street. Mrs. Lancaster saw that his ear was scarlet.

"What is the matter?" she asked, raising her eyebrows.

"Don't chaff, Blanche"—turning miserably round, and facing her mischievous eyes with a rather sheepish look. "I was a brute to come here and ask you to marry me, and you are an angel to take it as you do, instead of ordering me out of your house. But I won't trouble you again. I shall be off in a few days, and—and you won't let this affair interfere with our friendship, will you?"

"Of course not, you goose! But might a body inquire where you are off to?" Mrs. Lancaster spoke calmly enough; and how was Sir Charles, full of his own misery, and longing, and doubt, to know that she had smothered a sigh before she answered his question.

"Oh, anywhere! I don't see that it matters much. All places are alike, it seems to me. I suppose I ought to go down to Lowford according to contract, but I shall let my mother and poor Pussums do penance for me."

"Don't do anything of the sort," suggested Blanche firmly.

"Go down to the Crescent like a dutiful son-in-law, and while you are there, or sooner if possible, ask Miss Cherry to have you."

"Pshaw!" He came and flung himself down now in a low chair at her side. "What is the use of harping on that, Blanche? Supposing that—that I am spoony on that child—awfully spoony"—it seemed a relief to be able at least to make a clean breast of it—"I know very well that she does not care a rap for me; how should she! She looks upon me as quite an old fellow. I am Pussum's father to her, and nothing more."

"But why take all that for granted? Miss Vanbrugh is the person who ought to know best. Why not ask her?"

"Because I am afraid she would say yes."

"Oh, Sir Charles!"

"Well, I am." He colored again like a boy. "I mean that I—oh, hang it all, Blanche, what is the good of mincing matters! I know, of course, that all women like position and money, small blame to them—men do, too; and that poor pretty little darling has nothing to look forward to but a life in Lowford, and perhaps some clerk for a husband; and you may laugh, Blanche, but I could not bear to think that she would marry me for the mere sake of escaping from all that. And—"

Blanche Lancaster let her work drop into her lap, and lay back in her chair the better to look at him.

"It is the worst case I ever saw," she declared, appealing with raised eyebrows to the flower-boxes and curtains and chairs. "He wants to be loved for himself alone, at the mature age of thirty-five. Sir Charles, get up this instant and go home. My advice—my serious advice to you—is that you ask Miss Vanbrugh to be yours, as they say in the novels, before you dine to-night. You may come and tell me, to-morrow, how it all ends. And of course you understand that, if she accepts you, you have made an enemy of me for life."

Sir Charles stood up obediently, and there was a look of sudden determination and eagerness in his eyes. He lifted Mrs. Lancaster's pretty hands to his lips without a word, and took himself off.

"Miss Cherry came just in time," thought the widow, as, hidden in the balcony, she watched him ride away from her door. "I had almost made up my mind to accept him."

Lady West and her son had been bidden to a family banquet that evening—a solemnity which they were willing to spare Cherry; and so, for the first time since her arrival in London, the child had a few hours to herself, and one night not devoted to pleasure. She

felt that she was rather glad of a little time in which to draw breath and to think She had tea with Pussums in the nursery—where Sir Charles also was a guest for five minutes on his way to his dressing-room—and a royal game of romps to follow; after which, when Clementina was asleep, and Cheery had smoothed her own ruffled feathers, she went down stairs into the vast dimly lighted drawing-room, whose curtains were swaying slowly in the evening breezes. The coolness and silence were refreshing. She decided that it would be a good opportunity to write her daily letter to Henry.

She had posted one every morning regularly ever since she had left home, but so far she had not received a single line in reply.

"I am afraid Henry is vexed with me," she thought wistfully.

She found it impossible to shake off the curious feeling that came over her at the thought of the poor fellow. If she had been selfish in leaving him for a time, she had been punished for her fault, for the remembrance of his haggard face and kind melancholy eyes haunted her in the midst of all her delight. The feeling had grown to be positively morbid. Once or twice she had been startled by seeing him—as she fancied—among the throng of people she saw in the Park, or in the crowded streets along which she drove in Lady West's carriage. But, when she had looked again, she had convinced herself that it had been merely some resemblance to his head or figure that had misled her. Then she had drawn a deep breath of relief. But before long she would be thinking of him again, and uneasily blaming herself for being so happy away from her first and best friend.

It was a troubled happiness, at best, that the child was enjoying, but it seemed to Cherry that one day of it was worth more than a year of the old monotonous contentment in Eden Row. Every morning now, when she awoke, it was like awaking to a new life which each day grew more kind and more intense. It was not merely the amusements which awaited her, greatly as she delighted in these—in the pretty new costumes which kind Lady West was always devising and ordering for her, in the admiring glances and gentle words of the good-natured young men she met, in the pictures and sights and theaters, the garden-parties at the lovely old houses on the Thames, the drives on Sir Charles's drag, the dinners at Richmond. It was something above and beyond all these, something quite vague and indescribable, like the odor of ripe fruit and of summer roses which seemed to be thrilling in the air around her. And quickly, oh, so quickly, her enchanted week was drawing to

a close! In spite of all her resolutions, Cherry dreaded to think of her return home; of Frances and her cold looks and ways; of the dreary breakfasts and dinners at which so few words were spoken; of the long dull days in Eden Row, when brother and sister were both out and she sat alone for hours, eating her luncheon of bread and butter and listening to the ticking of the clock, or to Susan singing to herself over her kettles and pans.

"I won't think of it now, at any rate," the child thought, as she finished her affectionate little letter, and addressed it in her very neatest hand; "it will be bad enough when it comes." And, jumping up, she ran to the piano and began to play a waltz, and to sing it aloud with vague words of her own composition—

"Lovely London, I adore you;
Dear old Brook Street, how I love you!"

That was the burden of her song, but somehow the sound of her own voice in the big empty room sobered her, and she stood up again and flitted restlessly out on to the balcony.

She looked up at the stars and the black roofs and spires crowding against them, and she listened to the muffled roar of the distant streets, and to the roll of one or two carriages which drove, with flashing lamps, through that on which she looked down from her perch among the boxes of giant mignonette.

It was hardly dark, strewn though the sky was with innumerable stars; the warmth and languor of the June night was all round her, and through it she could feel the throbbing of the mighty heart of London. It saddened her. She felt very small and insignificant in that great empty house—a little cruel ache, a sense of loneliness and waiting crept chilly through her veins. But, oh, it would not do to be melancholy when she had only four days more of London left!

An hour later Sir Charles, who had, at the last moment, basely contrived to evade the family solemnity, and who had dined at his club, let himself into the house in Brook Street with his latch-key, and walked deliberately upstairs into the drawing-room. He had resolved, after an evening of painful cogitation, to follow Mrs. Lancaster's advice, and to put his fate to the test before he slept that night. His heart was thumping under his dress-clothes like a school-boy's. He hoped that he should find Cherry alone. Could there be a better opportunity?

The drawing-room door was half open, and he could see a white dress moving in the inner room, beyond the old tapestry *portière*.

Sir Charles softly closed the outer door, and crossed the half-lit room. Cherry did not hear him; she was very busy about something or other as he peeped round the heavy curtain.

The girl had evidently been ransacking some of Lady West's old finery. She had an antiquated brocade train pinned round her slender waist, and a bunch of white feathers stuck in her dark hair, and she was trailing all this splendor behind her in a very stately manner as she crossed the floor to the ottoman in the center of the room, against which she had propped up one of the cushions, having draped it in black and covered it with an old white tulle veil. Before this majestic image she paused, courtesied deeply, and extended her hand, bending her plumed head to kiss it, with the utmost reverence and gravity.

"The pretty darling," thought Sir Charles, bursting with suppressed laughter, "I see what she is up to! This is a presentation at Court, of course. I remember Blanche Lancaster was telling her all about it to-day at luncheon. Oh, me, what a child—what a perfect child she is still!"

That thought killed his laughter, and it was with a sober face enough he continued to watch her antics. What right had he to trouble her simplicity and sweet unconsciousness with any talk of man's love and longing? Who was he that he should dream of wearing that lovely bud of maidenhood in his *blasé* bloom?

When Cherry was tired of playing the *débutante*, and of announcing herself—in a deep voice meant to represent that of the orthrdox court official—as "Lady Cherry Vanbrugh," when she had practiced her courtesy often enough, and had succeeded in backing away from the pillow without tumbling over her train, then she proceeded to reverse the characters in her comedy.

Off came the feathers and on went the black drapery and the white veil. She took her stand royally before the ottoman, with a chair by her side, which was evidently intended to represent the Princess of Wales, and proceeded to receive, and not to render, homage. She had been told by Mrs. Lancaster that Her Gracious Majesty was wont on occasions to take shrewd notice of the ladies who were presented to her, and to make remarks upon their looks and bearing.

"Good, my daughter," Sir Charles heard Queen Cherry say, something in the fashion of Gertrude in "Hamlet," the only royalty with which Miss Vanbrugh's visit to London had made her familiar. "Methinks yonder damsel in the snowy robe did bend before us with unwonted reverence. Let her approach." With a dignified

wave of the royal hand—"Damsel, your queen is well pleased with you. Ask her a boon and she will grant it."

"May it please your majesty," said Lady Cherry Vanbrugh, who, with another deep courtesy, had approached the presence, having, in fact, faced the ottoman instead of standing with her back to that emblem of England's throne, "all I ask is, that Frances may be married immediately to a duke with lots of money, and that Henry and I may live happy ever after."

Henry! Sir Charles started as if he had been stung. Who was Henry, and how was it he had never heard of him before? A mortal coldness fell upon his leaping heart.

"I—I have no right to play the spy upon that child," he thought, clinching his hands and breathing hard; and, without an instant's pause, he turned and walked out of the room, closing the door hastily behind him.

Cherry heard the sound and blushed scarlet.

"If any one should come in and see me dressed up?" she cried, beginning to pull off her finery with many anxious looks at the door. "I did not think they could be home so soon. It is hardly ten o'clock."

She was eagerly gathering her wardrobe in both arms, and waiting for them to come into the room. A minute—two passed, as she stood, with her arms full, listening and smiling, but no one came; the house was still as quiet as it had been all the evening. The girl dropped her bundle of finery and sat down wearily, all the color dying out of her face.

"Oh, it is dreadful," she thought, "to be always listening for him! What shall I do when I am in Eden Row, where he will never come at all? Oh, it is so lonely here, and I can't play by myself!" And she burst into a passion of sudden tears.

Perhaps if Sir Charles had seen them, or noted how heavily the child heaped up her finery again to be carried upstairs, looking so much paler and less childish as she did so; if he had still been behind the *portière* then, perhaps he would not have gone out again that night, to stay out until long after Lady West had come home from her dinner-party, and all the house in Brook Street was fast asleep.

Even next morning, when Cherry came down-stairs, he was not there. There was a little note for his mother, and in the note a pleasant message for their little guest; but it said that Sir Charles had been compelled to run down to Cowes again for a day, so that they need not expect to see him until the following morning. The

day turned out to mean four days, and Cherry did not see him again until the morning fixed for their return to Lowford, when Sir Charles arrived in time to see them all off by the train.

"Oh, Charley-boy!" said Pussums, kissing her father with a wounded air. "Why did you run away and leave us? Cherry-mine has not enjoyed the end of her holiday one bit!'

"Indeed, yes!" interposed Cherry hastily, her sweet little face as red as a rose. "I have enjoyed it all. Every one has been very good to me!"

"But you are glad to go back to Lowford and to Henry?" Sir Charles asked, smiling kindly down on the little thing. During his four days' solitude he had made up his mind that he must not dream any longer of winning Cherry's love. "No doubt they are all longing to have you back."

All her blushes faded.

"Yes," she answered gently; "I am glad, of course, to go back to Henry." Then she held out her little hand on the platform. "Good-bye," she said with great simplicity. "I have been very happy in London. I shall remember it all my life!"

Sir Charles sighed, blindly mistaking the girl's emotion and changing color. But, even as he was about to let her go, he held the little timid hand warmly pressed in his own, and his lips parted eagerly. He seemed about to speak. Cherry's heart began to beat; but just at the same moment the whistle screeched, and Lady West bundled the two children into the carriage.

They saw Sir Charles standing hat in hand, and looking after the train as it steamed slowly out of the station.

* * * * * * *

When the carriage which had met them at the station stopped at the iron gate, Lady West and Pussums kissed Cherry again and again, and the little thing got out, feeling strangely nervous and lonely.

"You must be sure to come to us very soon, remember, my love!" said Sir Charles's mother cordially. "We shall miss our little companion very much!"

As for Clementina she held her playfellow so tightly round the throat that Cherry was almost choked. Her eyes filled up as she stood and watched them drive away. She was in no hurry to knock at the door; she knew very well that it wanted an hour yet to dinner-time, and that there would be nobody at home except Susan, and the cat. But to her surprise she found Miss Beauclerk in the

parlor, surrounded by dresses made and unmade, and, in attendance upon her, a person who had pins stuck in the body of her gown.

Frances gave Cherry her hand, and asked her whether she had enjoyed herself, and then she calmly continued her discussion with the dress-maker as to the relative merits of fringe and lace as a trimming for the dress then in process of construction. Poor Cherry looked on, uncomfortable and surprised.

"I—I hope Henry is quite well?" she faltered out, not venturing to sit down, since every chair was covered with silks and satins of gorgeous hue. What could Frances want with such raiment? she wondered.

"Henry!" Miss Beauclerk repeated absently, her eyes fixed upon the glass, in which she was following the dress-maker's movements. "I really do not know; I have not seen him since the day you left for London."

"Not seen him?" Cherry gasped. "Where has he gone, then? Is he at Northport by himself?"

"I have no idea. I only know that he has not been home, or at the office, for a week."

Then Cherry knew that it was Henry she had seen in the Park, and in the streets as she drove by. It had been no fancy. He had followed her. The poor child turned cold, she hardly knew why.

"And my letters?" she stammered. She knew now why they had never been answered.

"Your letters? I believe Martha carried them into the study, as you were pleased to call the back-parlor. No doubt you will find them there still. The sleeve a little tighter, Miss Pinkerton; let it follow the line of the arm exactly."

Cherry felt more and more bewildered and in the way. Perhaps Martha could tell her what it all meant. Wearily she pulled off her hat and gloves, and went into the little sunshiny kitchen. Old Martha was shelling peas at the window. Outside the swing hung motionless in the evening air; the mignonette in the yard was giving out its strong cool scent.

"Martha," said Cherry, feeling very much inclined to cry, "what is the matter with everybody? And why is Miss Beauclerk having so many new dresses made? She will not tell me anything."

The old servant had stood up to drop a smiling courtesy to Miss Vanbrugh.

"If you please, Miss Cherry," she said, "I think Miss Frances is going to be married."

Cherry felt as if she had received a smart box on the ears.

"To be married?" she echoed, not sure whether her home-coming were not all an ugly dream. "To whom? When? Why, Martha, I have only been away a week, and—and there was nobody then."

"No, miss, but the gentleman came the very day after you left. He asked to see Mr. Vanbrugh, Miss Cherry."

"Papa?" The child turned pale. "Oh, Martha, who was he? Didn't he know?"

"No, Miss Cherry. He said he had come all the way from New Zealand to see Mr. Vanbrugh and his daughter, and he had been directed here."

"Oh, don't tell me any more, Martha!" the child cried, breaking down altogether, and rushing away into the little study to cry to her heart's content.

Her grief sobbed itself away unnoticed and unheeded. So many feelings were blended with the pang with which the mention of her father's name had smote her that it seemed as if she could never cry enough to wash them all away. Some one who knew her father had come to see her, and was going to marry Frances, whom he had known only for a few days! And Henry was away, and perhaps angry with her. Oh, it was all very puzzling and very miserable! Only yesterday she had been so happy, and so well taken care of, and now—

At last, when it was almost dinner-time, and she could hear Frances opening the door for the dress-maker, and detaining her on the step with some parting injunction—at last Cherry dried her tears, and sat up straight in Henry's big chair—the chair she had bought for him, and smuggled in one day with Martha's help—to look about the room out of her poor swollen eyes.

The dust lay thick everywhere. It was Miss Beauclerk's protest—in that neat household—against Henry's assumption of the sole right to the use of the room. Dust lay on the books, on the red pots in the window, where Cherry's flowers drooped brown and dead for lack of water, on Henry's violin-case, and on a little heap of seven letters—the records of seven unforgotten days—that lay beside it. Cherry's lips trembled as she saw them. She remembered so vividly when and where each one had been written. On the envelope of the third Sir Charles had drawn a sketch of Fluff in his new collar, and—ah, well, all that was over now!

The girl had brought her present for Mr. Beauclerk—the splendid watch and chain that Sir Charles had helped her one day to choose; and she laid it in its morocco-case beside the unread letters.

"The best thing I can do now," she thought resolutely, "is to open the window and dust the room. As to my poor flowers, I am afraid they will never revive."

She was bending over the pots, busily snipping off the dead leaves, and watering the parched earth, when the door opened and Henry walked in, as quietly as though he had just returned from his office, and hung up his hat on its usual peg. Cherry dropped her scissors and her watering-pot with a little cry of pleasure and ran to meet him.

"Oh, Henry!" she said, holding out her two pretty hands. "Where have you been? I am so glad you have come back! You won't run away again, will you?"

He held the little hands as if he would never let them go again. He patted them between his big old palms, with fond and inarticulate murmurs; his tender, ugly face looked pale and worn; and his clothes dusty and neglected. Cherry bloomed before him like a little flower against a dingy wall.

"This is the last time you will leave me," he said at last, devouring the pretty pale face with his hungry eyes. "Cherry, you must promise me that! You see that I can not live here without you. I shall follow you wherever you go!"

"Then it was you I saw in London!" Cherry cried; and her cheek was a shade paler. "Henry, you bad boy, why didn't you come and see me—at the house, I mean?"

He broke into his old bitter laugh, and sat down, passing his handkerchief across his heated forehead.

"Not I!" he said roughly. "I only wanted to see for myself if you were happy. And I am satisfied. You were not. Couldn't I see the cloud on your face? Didn't I tell you true, child? Isn't it better to be here with me than flaunting about with great people who have a thousand other pleasures in this life?"

Cherry hung her head. How was she to tell him that it was the thought of him that had brought the cloud upon her face? She felt as if a net were being drawn about her, and that she could not take a step without stumbling.

It hardly seemed honest not to speak out, and yet how could she bear to hurt the poor, kind old fellow who had been so good to her, and to whom it seemed her fate to bring less pleasure than pain?

"I am glad you are pleased to have me back, dear," she said in the pretty wheedling voice he loved. "And I won't go away any more, if you don't wish it. I shall have to stay and take care of

you always, now; for oh, Henry"—in an impressive whisper—"what do you think? Frances is actually going to be married!"

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Mr. Mackenzie, the wealthy farmer from New Zealand, had just six weeks when he landed in England in which to select a wife. His business demanded that he should return within a given time, and he had made up his mind that he would not go back alone. Perhaps it was with some hope of being able to fall rapidly in love with William Vanbrugh's daughter, whose portrait he remembered to have seen and admired a couple of years before, that, his business in London being completed, he proceeded without delay to institute inquiries as to his old friend's whereabouts.

His search ended in the discovery that poor Will had been in his grave for more than a year, and that "the little girl," of whom he had so often fondly spoken to Stephen Mackenzie, was away on a visit to some friends in London. It was quite uncertain when Miss Vanbrugh would be back, he was assured by the stately hazel-eyed lady who received him with much graceful composure in the small parlor in Eden Row.

Mr. Mackenzie felt that he had no time to lose, and that he must give up thinking of Will's daughter. With some embarrassment, and a boyish blush that showed through all his wholesome tan and sunburn, he explained to Miss Beauclerk the object of his visit to Lowford. He was forty years old; he had always meant to marry an English girl and no other; he had a house and a fortune fit to offer any woman, be she whom she might; all that he wanted to complete his prosperity and happiness was a handsome woman to sit at the head of his table, and drive in his carriages. A slight flush sprung to Miss Beauclerk's face as she bowed in answer to this explanation; it made her look very handsome indeed.

Mr. Mackenzie, as he rose to take leave, said to himself that she was the finest woman he had yet seen in England. He went away, and in a few hours knew all about the Beauclerks, from the time of their father's bankruptcy and suicide, down to the admirable devotion shown by Frances to her brother, a thankless sort of fellow, who was even now off on some spree or other, leaving his sister to work, as she had always done, for their living. Pity was added to admiration in honest Stephen's mind. He asked himself that night, over his lonely dinner at the Crown, why he need go further afield, when there was a wife who seemed to be actually cut out for him?

And meeting Frances the next day, on her way to one of her pu-

pils, he found her, in her becoming bonnet, and calico gown, so much handsomer even than his recollection of her, that he hesitated no longer, but asked her then and there, on the shady side of the street, to marry him.

Miss Beauclerk was not much surprised. She rapidly reviewed the situation. She had no parents to protect her, her brother was away; what had she to lose in breaking with the hard life she had led, uncomplainingly, for so many years? Was it likely she would ever have such a golden opportunity offered to her again? She was certainly not getting younger. But who would assist her, now, in her need? The lady whose daughters she was on her way to teach had always been kind to her. Would she?—Miss Beauclerk paused at the lady's door.

"Come back in half an hour, Mr. Mackenzie," she said quietly. "I will present you to Mrs. Murgatroyd, and give you my answer."

"I am prepared with credentials that will satisfy her, I'll warrant," returned Stephen Mackenzie as quietly. "And I'll be very good to you, Miss Beauclerk, if you will have me."

And a few days later, in Mrs. Murgatroyd's drawing-room, he was accepted. There was little time to lose. Mrs. Mackenzie's *trousseau* was to be ordered in Paris during her honey-moon, but certain preparations were necessary before the wedding could take place, and these were at once commenced under the supervision of good natured Mrs. Murgatroyd, who was never weary of talking to her friends about what she called this "romance of real life."

Poor Henry's angry amazement, when he heard the facts, affected his sister but little. Her mind was too entirely absorbed in her own affairs. Mr. Mackenzie was absent for a few days, making the final arrangements for their voyage to New Zealand, but in a week he was to be back to claim his bride.

"And Cherry?" Henry asked abruptly. "What is to become of Cherry if you desert us both in this heartless fashion?"

"Cherry? Cherry must take care of herself, I suppose," his sister returned calmly, "as I have done ever since I was eighteen. She will go to her mother's relations, no doubt, unless indeed you intend to marry her."

Henry turned upon her with an oath; he was as white as death.

"You know that that is impossible!" he said with livid lips. "But you can go your way, and leave us; I will do my best to take care of her when you are gone!"

Miss Beauclerk felt that she was meeting with the usual ingrati-

tude from her brother. It seemed to her that she was behaving extremely well. She had settled upon him, with Mr. Mackenzie's permission, the little old house in Eden Row, and the income derived from her godmother's legacy, which, with his own salary, would enable Henry to live in their accustomed manner, though not to indulge in idleness, or such absurd freaks as he had occasionally broken out into. If Cherry was willing to marry him, her small fortune would of course be an addition to his means.

And so Frances Beauclerk was given away by Mr. Murgatroyd to Stephen Mackenzie, and sailed with a tranquil conscience for her new home; nor was she ever seen again by her brother, or the daughter of poor Will Vanbrugh. Lady West was for carrying little Cherry off to the Crescent at once, but the girl steadily resisted all temptation, and declared that she had promised never to leave Henry any more.

"You know, dear Lady West," she explained, blushing over her new importance, "there is no one but me now to order the dinner, and pay the bills, and see that Henry does not set fire to the house with his pipe. It would never do to leave him by himself. He would forget to eat any dinner, poor dear old fellow, or to take his umbrella when it rained."

"But you can not live in that house alone with him, my love," urged Sir Charles's mother kindly. "You know you are no relation to Mr. Beauclerk, after all, and you are too young."

But Cherry did not understand.

"I can't leave him," she pleaded steadfastly. "Please don't ask me, dearest Lady West, for it breaks my heart to refuse. I know I gave way before, but I will not this time. It makes Henry too unhappy."

And Lady West saw that she must take the matter into her own hands, and appeal to Henry Beauclerk's sense of propriety. But she resolved that she would first consult her son, who was daily expected at the Crescent.

CHAPTER VI.

THE days were longer and lonelier than ever in Eden Row, it seemed to poor little Cherry, though Frances had never taken much notice of her, or tried to make her happy. But at least, while Miss Beauclerk was at home, she had had her visits to the Crescent to look forward to; the long idle happy mornings with Lady West and Pussums; the feeling of being watched for there; the delight-

ful friendly luncheons, and jokes, and games that awaited her in the big comfortable house.

She sat and remembered these days now, with an incessant wistful aching in her childish breast. She thought of them regretfully as "the old days" when she was happy; before she had given that promise to Henry never to leave him; before she had met Sir Charles West, and fallen into that foolish weary way of listening to every footfall that broke the silence of the old passage. The footsteps never paused at the door, above which the lamp swung among the ivy. Sir Charles, who had been so merry and so kind, had forgotten all about her, it seemed. He had failed to follow his mother to Lowford, as it had been arranged that he would. Every Sunday little Cherry's heart beat painfully as she walked into church with Henry, and looked at Mr. Fordyce's pew, where, besides the familiar bald head of Henry's employer, there would be only Lady West's Paris bonnets and Clementina's floating hair to be seen.

She had almost given up hoping to see any one else there—the broad shoulders and close-cropped fair head, and immaculate London coats that she remembered so well. At least she thought she had; but she could not help looking and watching. And she lay awake at nights, fretting, recalling, longing, until her health gave way, and she went about her little housewifely duties with two red spots burning in a pale face, and two dark eyes shining with unnatural brightness.

At first little Clementina had come to Eden Row, now and then, to play with her old friend, and to swing in the yard; but Cherry saw plainly enough that Henry had been disturbed and annoyed when he heard of these visits; so she gave up even this pleasure.

When the sultry August weather came, Cherry used to sit in the dark little house and pant for air. Henry made a point of taking her out every evening when he got back from the office, but the girl soon grew tired, and would beg to be taken home again, when she would lie on the sofa, smiling at Henry's anxious old face, and assuring him, whenever he looked up, that she was greatly interested in the German book he was reading to her.

Then she grew suddenly worse, and they had to send for the doctor. Poor Henry's heart stood still with terror. What could he do for his darling—he, so clumsy and stupid, and inexperienced? Why, even old Martha in the kitchen was a better nurse, and knew more about sick people's ways than he. The poor fellow hung his head when Lady West came to look after her little friend.

"Ah, Mr. Beauclerk," she said, not unkindly, "why won't you

let us take care of her for you? She is such a delicate little thing to be left all day alone; she needs a woman's hand about her."

"I do my best for her," poor Henry mumbled out, looking up meekly from under his shaggy brows at the fine lady, as he was calling Lady West in his thoughts. "Cherry knows that I do, and she is contented. She—she is not really ill—she will soon be all right again, won't she?"

His accent—the piteous look of his ugly face, went to Lady West's heart.

"She is young," she answered gently. "You must let me help you to nurse her. And, when she is better, you will please lend her to us now and then, Mr Beauclerk; she needs a change. Not that Cherry complains; no, indeed. But—"

"Do as you like?" he blurted out roughly; and he turned on his heel and left the room.

Cherry would have refused to go to the Crescent, when she got better, if Henry himself had not insisted on it.

"Go, my little Cherry," he said, in his rugged and tender voice. "I am but a clumsy nurse for you, child. But you forgive me for that, and you will come back? My dear, it is so little I can do for you; and they can do so much. But if it was my life you wanted, I would give it as cheerfully."

She took his big trembling hand in both her weak little palms, and laid her cheek against it.

"I will come back," she said, her eyes filling with tears. "They are very kind, but my home is here with you."

As the carriage drew near the house in the Crescent, her heart was beating in the old troubled way. She did not know whether she should see Sir Charles or not. She said to herself that she had almost forgotten his face—the beautiful clear-cut face with the gentle, laughing eyes—she thought that if she could see it once again she would stop thinking of it so much. It was so miserable to be perpetually haunted by one face.

But there was no Sir Charles in the Crescent. He had been down, and was gone again. He did not care to see her, Cherry thought, as Lady West carried her off to her own room to be petted and to rest, and be adored by Pussums. She did not know what a sharp struggle between inclination and duty Pussums's father had gone through before he decided on going away. He, too, had been haunted by one face ever since Cherry had left Brook Street, and he was a good deal ashamed of his infatuation. More than once he had tried to confess the state of his feelings to his kind old mother,

but he could not pluck up the necessary courage. He thought every one would laugh at him for having fallen in love, like a school-boy, with his little girl's playfellow, and, being still firmly of the opinion that if little Cherry could be brought to marry him, it would not be for love, he felt that he could better bear to let her go with all her sweet and childish graces, than to secure his own desire at the cost of her better interests.

In the warm home atmosphere of the Crescent, Cherry got better, steadily enough, of her illness. But, when she was fairly convalescent, she seemed to have left her childhood behind. Pussums hoped that when her little playfellow grew stronger she would take the old pleasure in their games and happy nonsense together, but Cherry knew that she had done with those childish delights forever.

Lady West thought it was prettier than ever to see the two together. A quaint little maternal air had taken the place of Cherry's madcap ways with the little girl. She began to teach Pussums her letters, and set her a handkerchief to hem. Clementina did not get through many stitches at a time, but she liked to sit by Cherry's sofa, and be instructed. At such times they had long whispered talks together. A marked improvement became noticeable in Miss Pussums's behavior; she was more tractable, and gave less trouble.

Sir Charles read of all these simple home-doings in his mother's letters. He was in Scotland, and grouse were plentiful; but the thought of those two innocent heads, bending over a spelling-book together, came many a time between him and his sport.

"It is a pity," his mother wrote, "that you can not run down for a day or two before Cherry goes home; I am afraid we shall soon have to give her up. She is almost herself again now, and Mr. Beauclerk grudges her to us, I can see. The feeling she has for that most uninteresting man is really surprising, poor child."

Henry had conquered his shyness so far as to call once or twice, though he refused to see any one but Cherry. He brought her word of her birds and flowers; he told her wistfully how lonely the house was without her. When he went away Lady West found Cherry nervous and trembling, talking about going home, but clinging to her with a sort of convulsive fondness.

"My love," the good-natured lady said, "I wish we could keep you altogether." Upon which the tears that were brimming in Cherry's dark eyes rolled over, and ran down the pretty pale cheeks.

"What would poor Henry say to that?" she cried, laughing somewhat hysterically. "I think he has been very patient and good to spare me for so long."

"You are very fond of Mr Beauclerk, darling, are you not?" Lady West asked, kissing the tears away, as she laid her face down on the little nestling head.

"Indeed, indeed, I am."

"If he asked you to marry him, Cherry—would you consent?"

Cherry changed color.

"I think I could do anything in the world that would please Henry," she said simply. "He has been very good to me, Lady West. And he is so poor, and lonely, and unhappy."

The last day of her visit came. Early the next morning she was to go home Pussums was to be allowed to dine down-stairs that evening, and was to wear the broad crimson sash and ribbons that Cherry had bought for her. A few more hours only were left before night came, and good-byes must be said. Even old Fordyce declared that he was sorry Miss Cherry need leave the Crescent, where he was always pleased to see her pretty little face.

She went upstairs very early to put on her white muslin gown. She thought she would like to go all over the house before any one else was down, and say good-bye to the rooms where she had been so very happy. She felt, somehow, as if she never should come back to the Crescent. Would it not be better, indeed, to stay away, lest it might be the fact of her presence there which was keeping Sir Charles from his little daughter all this time?

"I suppose men in the world always talk to you and look at you as he did," the girl mused sadly as she went flitting a slim white shape, down the dark staircase to the drawing-room. "Henry told me that Sir Charles once made Frances believe that he wanted to marry her, though he was engaged at the time to Pussums's mother. I am glad I know that he only meant to be kind to me in his own house. It was my fault if he reminded me of *Wilhelm Meister* in the opera. He did not intend to talk like a lover; only like a friend."

Noiselessly and swiftly in her white gown Cherry flitted from room to room; touching certain objects here and there with her little hot hands; pausing by a window, or in a corner, to recall some pleasant scene; laying her cheek down for a moment on the brocaded arm of Lady West's favorite easy-chair.

In Lady West's own sitting-room there hung, just over her davenport, a large and spirited portrait of Sir Charles. He had brought it down with him when he came, declaring that the old ones, if he might judge by little Miss Vanbrugh's impressions, must be even greater libels than photographs usually are Many a time before, during her visit, Cherry had stolen in to have a look at the hand-

some good-natured face, which was hung just on a level with her own. How could she ever have thought him cold and stern? she wondered now. Trembling, she took a rose from her belt, and laid it on the ledge of the desk which stood below. Lady West would never know who had laid it there. It was only to say good-bye to him forever. She would have turned away then, but the eyes of the picture seemed to follow her and hold her fast. She stood and looked back at them, and a sudden flush began to burn in her pale cheeks; then, bending forward with a rapid impulse, she kissed the photograph on its unconscious lips.

At the very same instant, she felt herself caught from behind in two strong gentle arms, and heard Sir Charles speak her name in a passionate whisper. If he had any doubt left as to her feeling for him, it vanished at sight of the sudden glory of joy that illuminated the girl's face. How could she help uttering that low cry of delight? Sir Charles was there, as if in answer to the passionate unuttered yearning of her heart; not his picture merely, but his warm living breathing self, whose eyes were looking deep into her eyes, as he held her with tender force against him, whose lips were covering her lips and her eyes and hair with fast-falling kisses, whose voice was thrilling her with fond inarticulate murmurs.

"My little love!" he said at last, holding her still, but drawing back his head to look down at the rose red face on his breast. "I do not deserve such happiness, but I thank Heaven for it with all my heart and soul! Cherry, tell me! It is so hard to believe it. I am such a good-for-nothing fellow; do you really care for me a little? Will you marry me, my dear, and live with Pussums and me always?"

He saw a change come over her face. She closed her dark eyes wearily.

"No," she said quietly; and she put a little shaking hand up to his shoulder, and laid her head down there again.

"Cherry!" he cried, startled.

"Yes, I know! I am very sorry. For I do love you, Sir Charles"—he pressed her closer with a sigh of relief—"more than I know how to tell you, I think, but I can not marry you."

"Not if you love me?" Sir Charles put his own broad palm over the little hand on his shoulder. "Darling, what can separate us if we are fond of each other?"

She sighed.

"Henry," she answered gently.

"Henry Beauclerk?" There was a note of disdain in Sir Charles's

voice. "My little Cherry, you must leave al that to me. You are mine now, and do you think I will let any one take you for me?"

She rubbed her cheek softly against his coat, and the little hand crept up higher and rested on his neck.

"I like to hear you say so," she said; "it is like the dreams I have often had!"

"Dreams of me, Cherry?" Sir Charles whispered eagerly.

"Yes; and you used to kiss me in them, and tell me that you loved me. I am glad it has come true, even for a little while. I know it can't last, and perhaps it is cruel to be glad, but I am—very, very glad!"

"You pretty child! And why can't it last? Are not we engaged, Cherry darling, from to-day? What strange notions have you got into this dear little head?"

"I am thinking of Henry," she said, again quietly. "I will never do anything to make him unhappy, Sir Charles."

"Not Sir Charles any more, dear! My wife must learn to call me by some sweeter name than that! And do you think of Mr Beauclerk before me?"—jealously.

"Yes," she answered sadly. "I love you best; but you are like myself, and I think of you last, and of Henry before any one else in the world. I should be a selfish cruel girl if I could ever forget what he has done for me!"

"My darling"—Sir Charles was still a little jealous in spite of her sweet assurances—"there is no need that you ever should forget it; but how can our engagement make your friend unhappy?"

"Because I promised," Cherry began with trembling lips.

"Promised—what?" Sir Charles started back, still holding the little hands in his, and eagerly searching her face. "Not—not that you would marry him, Cherry; do not say that—I—"

"No," she answered simply. "He has never spoken of such a thing. He has been in love with Melissa Garth for a great many years. I mean that I promised I would never leave him any more."

"Oh, is that all!" Sir Charles broke into a little laugh of intense relief, and drew her to him again. "That is a promise that most little girls make to their friends, but they are always expected to break it some day."

"Oh, you do not understand," pleaded Cherry earnestly. "He will not let me marry any one. That is what I should have told you at first; but I was so happy that I could not!"

She began to cry—she was weak still, and nervous.

Sir Charles gently dried the long dark lashes. He did not feel

very much alarmed at the prospect of Henry Beauclerk's opposition. He was falling deeper and deeper in love every moment. After his weary weeks of suspense and self-torment, it was like a dream to be standing there with his arms about Cherry, her lovely little face upturned to his, and to be listening to her artless and passionate confessions.

"Darling," he said fondly, "we will see whether we can not melt the heart of this terrible guardian of yours."

"But he is very kind and gentle," she urged. "He is not terrible at all, Sir Charles."

"Sir Charles again! Cherry is that what you are going to call me when I take you home to the Hall?" He felt her start, and saw her blush, though the anxious look did not quit her face; and, in a lower, fonder voice, he whispered, "Will you say it when we sit at breakfast together, Cherry, and you are pouring out my tea for me, or when we are walking to church and Pussums is running on before after the butterflies? Will you say, 'Sir Charles, how that darling child does grow!' Will you?"—with a gentle little shake. There was no answer, but poor little Cherry's breathing had quickened. "Think how often you will run to meet me with a kiss when I come home tired after a hard day's shooting, and how badly 'Sir Charles' and kisses will go together. You foolish, sweetest little Cherry, call me Charley, and tell me again that you love me!"

The kind happy voice—the masterful clasp—the pretty home-pictures he was conjuring up! The girl looked wildly round her, feeling how vain it was to struggle in his arms, and at last, with a great gasp of relief, she heard the dressing-bell resound through the silent house.

"By Jove, I suppose I must run away!" cried Sir Charles reluctantly. "Oh, darling, how happy you have made me! What will Pussums and my mother say! It is a shame to keep the good news from them until after dinner; but me must, there is no time."

And so with a last gentle kiss he took himself away.

But when he came down-stairs, having dressed with all possible speed, he found no Cherry—only a little note which the butler handed to him, and which told him that Cherry had gone home.

"Do not tell Lady West and Pussums," the girl wrote. "I could not make you understand really, but I know that Henry will not consent, so there will be nothing to tell."

Baffled and vexed, Sir Charles made immediate inquiries. No

one had opened the door for Miss Vanbrugh or had seen her leave the house. The little thing must have walked to Eden Row alone, in the dusk, in her white dress.

"What hold has that man got over her?" thought the lover hotly. "Is he coward enough to try to frighten a helpless child like that?"

He found Cherry sitting quietly in the parlor at Eden Row. She had put on her little every-day gown, and was sewing at the table while Mr. Beauclerk read aloud.

Sir Charles's recognition of Henry was remarkably curt. He went straight up to the girl, who at his entrance had started her to her feet, uttering a faint cry.

"Cherry," he said, with tender reproach, "did you think that I could sleep to-night without knowing that you were safe? Why did you run away from us, my dear? Don't you know that my only wish—our only wish—is to make you happy?"

Cherry looked piteously from her lover's ardent face to Henry, who had closed the book, and was nervously turning it round and round in his shaking hands.

"I thought I ought to come home," she said. "Lady West would not be angry with me if she knew. Oh, Sir Charles, Henry wants me most!"

Henry said nothing, but his haggard eyes flashed a swift look of gratitude at her. They had been scowling all this time at the handsome and well-dressed London man, whose presence seemed to make the little parlor smaller and dingier than ever. Sir Charles was quite at his ease.

"It is with Mr. Beauclerk that I desire to speak," he answered gently. "Do you mind leaving us together for a few minutes, Cherry? Don't be alarmed, dear," he hastened to add, seeing how she trembled. "I am only going to inform your guardian—if that is the title Mr. Beauclerk claims—of our engagement. And—"

Poor little Cherry dropped her work, and ran to Henry's side. He had started up, too, as Sir Charles spoke, and was breathing heavily and fast.

"I told Sir Charles I could not be engaged, dear," she urged hurriedly. "He will tell you so himself. I know what I have promised, and I will keep my word!"

Henry laid his big hand tenderly upon the pretty uplifted head.

"My poor little Cherry," he murmured hoarsely. "I did my best to spare you this pain, but I suppose it can not be helped. Go now, my child"—he forced a smile upon his sad and disturbed

face as he put her from him. "Leave me for a while with this gentleman, and let me hear what he has to say."

She turned her lips to one of his shaking hands.

"Whatever you decide, I will be satisfied," she said gently, and she went away at once.

She did not even look at Sir Charles, who had been devouring her pale young beauty with his eyes. The two men were left alone. There was a pause of some moments. Sir Charles maintained the same unruffled composure. Henry Beauclerk was undergoing some sharp inward struggle. It was visible in the working of his ugly face, and in the uncouth gestures and twitchings which were habitual with him when he was strongly moved. At last he spoke.

"I think I understand," he said abruptly. "There is no need of many words. You want to marry Miss Vanbrugh?"

"Yes."

Henry wiped the damp from his forehead and went on—

"I have no power to prevent your doing so"—Sir Charles bowed slightly. "But I—I—believe, when you have heard what I have to tell you, that you will think twice before you repeat your offer."

"Let me hear what you have to tell, sir, by all means."

Henry was turning and twisting the book about again; he did not look up as he spoke; the lamp shone upward on his face and showed it be ghastly pale.

"Cherry knows," he continued, in the same hesitating and broken way, "whether I have done my best, or not, to avert this sorrow from her. But girls are ignorant and helpless young creatures. It is not her fault if she has been flattered into forgetting the plain duty I have striven to impress upon her." He paused, but there was no answer. Sir Charles was composedly waiting for him to proceed. "It has been my constant endeavor," poor Henry went on, "to teach her to be contented with the home I have to offer her, believing as I do, that it is the only one on which she can depend with safety in the future."

"I am here to offer her mine," Sir Charles said then.

He could not conquer a certain feeling of repulsion with which Henry Beauclerk inspired him, and he spoke with a haughtiness that was very unusual in one so good-natured.

"I know"—Henry was wiping his forehead again—"and it is because of your offer that I consider it my duty to tell you certain facts about my poor—about Miss Vanbrugh's family."

"We are a long time coming to these facts, sir."

Henry looked up, stung by the other's continued stiffness.

"They are soon told," he said abruptly. "Sir Charles West, the girl whom you wish to make your wife and the mother of your child is"—he blurted out the words as if they hurt him—"is the daughter of a servant, whose relatives—a drunken shoemaker and his family—are now living in London, at no very great distance from your own house."

Sir Charles changed color.

"You have proof of this?" he demanded, quitting his nonchalant attitude, and looking roused at last.

"I have; undeniable proof. Cherry herself will confirm what I have told you."

"Cherry? She knows these relations?"

"She knows of them. She has never met them; but they were her only friends in the world when she came to live with my sister and me. Sir Charles"—poor Henry's voice was shaken with strong emotion—"my house, poor as it is, has been a safer shelter for Cherry than her own relations could have offered her. She might have lived here happily enough, if she had not been tempted away, and been dazzled by glimpses of a life above her station. Oh, leave her to me, to take care of, as her father charged me to do! She is young, and will forget you. Be generous, and go away."

Sir Charles did not answer. It seemed as if he had not even listened to Henry's appeal. He had turned away to the window, where he stood looking out over Cherry's pots of flowers, his arms folded, and his good-tempered brows knit. Then he suddenly wheeled round.

"I will not deny," he said, "that what I have just heard is profoundly distasteful to me. But I beg you to understand at once, Mr. Beauclerk, that it makes no difference in my feeling for Miss Vanbrugh. I love her," he added with simplicity, "and I would be proud to marry her if I were a duke, instead of the quiet country gentleman I am."

The sharp sound of rent paper filled the room; the book that Henry had been holding fell torn and coverless on to the floor.

"You can not marry her," he said in a constrained voice. "Why will you not understand that—that it is impossible?"

"But I repeat that I will!" returned the lover hotly. "She has told me that I am not indifferent to her"—a spasm crossed Henry Beauclerk's pallid face—"and I see nothing in what you have told me that can cause me to forfeit my honor. I asked Miss Vanbrugh

an hour ago to be my wife. I repeat the offer formally now to you, as you have constituted yourself her guardian."

"You can not marry her," Henry repeated, in the same constrained voice. "There is another bar between you—"

"What!"—Sir Charles started. "In Heaven's name, sir, speak out, and let us have done with mysteries. If you know of anything which should prevent my marriage with your ward, speak out like a man, and let me know where I stand."

"I would rather cut my tongue out than tell you," Henry answered between his clinched teeth. "I never meant that you, or any one else in the wide world should know it. I believed—judging by my former experience of fine gentlemen such as you—that the knowledge of my poor child's low origin and disgraceful relations would have been enough to turn you from your purpose, but it seems that I was mistaken, and—and you must be told the truth."

"By George, sir, if you keep me much longer in this suspense, I'll wring it out of you!" Sir Charles's composure had disappeared utterly. He faced the other man with a dangerous gleam in his eye, and with a heightened color.

"Spare your threats," Henry answered sadly. "Ah, Sir Charles, I say to you once again—do not ask to know! Be generous, go home to your little girl, and believe me, when I tell you that you will never marry Cherry Vanbrugh."

The blood stood still in Sir Charles's veins. There was a strange weird melancholy in the poor fellow's face, and it impressed him with a vague horror.

"Why not?" he asked mechanically, his voice sinking almost into a whisper.

"Swear to me that you—you will not repeat it," Henry returned, still deadly pale in the lamplight. "Swear to me that it shall remain a secret buried in your heart and mine, the only living men who know it."

"I swear," Sir Charles said. Then hurriedly—"What is this secret? Why may not I marry Cherry Vanbrugh?"

"Because—" Henry drew a step nearer, and uttered a few words in the ear of the young man, who staggered back as if he had been shot.

"This is true?" he panted out.

"It is too true."

Half an hour later, Cherry, who was sitting in her little chamber, across whose floor the flickering shadow of the lamp swung to and

fro, heard the door close behind Sir Charles and his footsteps die away along the old flagged passage.

* * * * * * *

Sir Charles West's hasty departure from Lowford that night was followed before many days by the sudden death of old Fordyce, an event which naturally led to many changes in the household at the Crescent. But, even in the midst of the distress and confusion which reigned around her, kind Lady West did not forget little Cherry, round whose neck Pussums clung, sobbing and inconsolable, when the time came for saying their last good-bye.

"I don't think that we shall ever come back to the Crescent to live, my love," Lady West said to her pale little friend "Sir Charles dislikes Lowford so much. But you may be sure that, as soon as ever we return to England, Pussums and I will come and pay you a visit. And you must write to me, dear child. You must promise me, if anything should happen, to come straight to us—don't forget.

"You are going to leave England?" Cherry faltered.

Her poor little heart sunk within her at the thought. Though she knew that it did not really matter; though she had Sir Charles's few lines of farewell hidden away inside the bodice of her gown while she spoke. Could thousands of miles separate her from him more utterly than his own written words?

"Yes, my love," Lady West sighed. "That is my son's latest whim. He has taken a house in some out-of-the-way place in Brittany, and I believe we shall remain abroad for a year at least. It is too bad! Just, too, when Clem and I were looking forward to having you with us at the Hall for Christmas! I wish"—fondly kissing the pretty wistful face—"that we might carry you off with us to France; but I suppose Mr. Beauclerk would not hear of it, and that it would really be too much to ask of him just yet."

For a year! Cherry felt that a year meant forever. She knew that Sir Charles would never come back, and that she should never be sent for to the Hall. Henry had told her—that night when she crept down from her little room after the footsteps died away—told her very gently and kindly that her lover was gone: and early the next morning Sir Charles's note had been brought by one of the servants from the Crescent.

"My little Cherry, good-bye," it said. "I am going away; I must not see you again. Mr. Beauclerk refuses his consent to our marriage, as you thought he would, and there is nothing for us but

to part. I shall love you all my life. May Heaven bless and keep you, Cherry. Try to forget me if you can."

She read it through again when she went home that afternoon from the empty house in the Crescent. And then, steadily drying her tears and washing the traces of them from her wan little cheeks, she went down-stairs to be ready to meet Henry.

"They are all gone now, dear," she told him, smiling her pretty melancholy smile. "We have only each other left."

But there was yet another change to be told, and Henry explained, somewhat hurriedly, that, owing to Mr. Fordyce's death, and the transfer of the business into other hands, his own services would no longer be required at the office in Conyngham Lane, and he would be compelled to seek employment elsewhere.

CHAPTER VII.

THE year's exile which Sir Charles had decreed was slowly extending into two. Lady West's heart yearned toward the Hall, and her rose-garden and schools and poor people, but she would utter no complaint so long as her son seemed content to spend his time with her and his little girl, instead of rushing aimlessly about the world, as his custom had been during the life-time of old Mr. Fordyce. She was too happy in his society, moody and irritable as he had undoubtedly grown since they left England—irritable especially on the subject of Lowford and everything connected with their life there. Even little Pussums had learned not to express her regrets and longings for Cherry, too often, in her kind Charley-boy's hearing.

"I believe my son connects the thought of that poor child with the slavery we all went through at the Crescent," Lady West said sometimes to Sir Charles's old friend, Mrs. Lancaster.

Blanche was still a widow. During her travels she had stumbled on them, buried as they were in their picturesque old *château* in Brittany, and had gayly begged for an invitation to spend some weeks with them before she went back to Clarges Street for the season.

"Sir Charles and I will promise not to flirt, dear Lady West," she declared, laughing, on the first day of her visit. "We have gone through that stage, and are sworn friends now for life."

She had put on a Paris gown for dinner, and looked provokingly pretty as she delivered this challenge to her moody host. He did

not seem to hear it. He was absently pulling the ears of a great wolf-hound that lay on the hearth-rug at his feet, and was staring into the blazing logs with melancholy eyes.

Later in the evening, when Lady West had gone to see Pussums tucked up in bed, Mrs. Lancaster summoned up all her audacity, and asked a question that brought a fierce gleam into Sir Charles's heavy glance.

"You never came and told me the result of your investigations two years ago," she said, as lightly as though her heart were not beating with something very like fear. "What did that pretty little Cherry say to you, after all?"

"Mrs. Lancaster!" Sir Charles started up frowning and gnawing his mustache.

"Well, you know you promised to tell me!" the pretty widow persisted, laying down her work, lest he should see how unsteady her hands were. "Would she not have you, really, Sir Charles?"

For a moment he looked as if he could have seized her and crushed her into silence; then, recovering himself, he broke into a short miserable laugh.

"No!" he said, thrusting his hands into his pockets and turning on his heel· "she would not have me, as you see."

Blanche Lancaster looked after him as he left the room, and, as she looked, her eyes softened, and she sighed.

"I gave her her chance once," she thought, going to the window to watch him as he whistled for his dog, and went off in the direction of the stables. "Something has kept them apart. I suppose she likes somebody else. Well, it is all over, evidently, and he will be happier with me than living such a life as he is living now!"

Sir Charles did not appear in the *salon* again that night. His mother explained to their guest, with a little apology, that he often took long walks or rides at that hour, hoping by such means to conquer the sleeplessness which had taken possession of him.

Ride as far and as fast as he would, the young man could not escape from the fierce devil of wrath which had been aroused in him by Mrs. Lancaster's questions.

"How dared she speak her name?" he was saying to himself, over and over again, as he spurred his horse across the wide and desolate plains that stretched on all sides of the *château*.

Had he given up home, and country, and buried himself alive in that foreign hole, to be insolently reminded by a mere stranger—so he called an old friend in his anger—of all that it was the object of his life to forget? If it were not that England held the child of his

unhappy love, would his mother be sighing—as he knew she was, bravely though she tried to hide it from him—for the house whose memories had grown, a life-time strong and deep, about her heart? Would Pussums be growing up a stranger to those who had known her father from a boy? But if they were at the Hall, within easy reach of that little house in Eden Row, what could deter them—loving woman and loving child—from seeking out their little petted favorite? Would he himself have the strength to deny himself a sight of the sweet beloved face, the thought of whose pale and wistful looks kept him awake at night, and would not let him rest? He knew too well that in distance lay his only safety. And Blanche Lancaster, a woman he had once liked, could utter her name, her fondly cherished and forbidden name, as she might utter the name of the first sunburned peasant by the road-side.

"How long is that woman going to stay?" he fretfully demanded of his mother the next morning.

Lady West colored, hesitating. Already she had begun to think that her former dislike of Mrs. Lancaster had been uncalled for; that Pussums decidedly got on better with her than of old; that she herself could forgive much to the woman—well-bred and amiable—who would reconcile her son to his native land, and divert him from his rapidly increasing gloom. She had had other hopes, but they, she felt, had been unfounded, and Sir Charles had never really cared for Cherry.

"You don't dislike Blanche Lancaster, Charles?" she asked with secret anxiety. "In the absence of any near neighbors, I really consider her quite an acquisition myself. And Pussums likes her."

"I am a selfish brute," groaned the young man, bending down to kiss his mother's forehead. "Of course you are glad of a pleasant companion, dear. You must try to induce Mrs. Lancaster to spare us as much time as possible."

As he spoke, he saw his little girl and Blanche coming up the terrace-steps together, laughing, and sticking roses in Bevis's collar; and Blanche's hair shone golden in the sun.

* * * * * * *

When two women put their heads together, when a man has his child's happiness to consider, when the man is indolent and impressionable, and has buried the one serious passion of his life out of sight forever—what happens?

Lady West began to hope for the very best. Blanche Lancaster in London, in society, in the incessant whirl of town-life, was a

very different being from Blanche Lancaster, simple, unaffected, and good temper personified, in a quiet French country-house. She was the life of the drowsy, sunshiny old place. She romped with Clem; learned to make all sorts of dishes from Nanon the cook, played bezique with Lady West; rode with Sir Charles, sung songs for him, and talked to him in the long light evenings. Not about Cherry any more. She had been compelled to cause him that one pang, but now she knew all that she cared to know, and her care henceforth was to soothe, and not to wound her old friend's feelings. It was a pleasant state of things for them all. Indeed, they had grown to look upon it as such a matter of course that Lady West was quite startled one morning to hear Mrs. Lancaster count the few remaining days of her visit.

"We had forgotten that you need ever leave us!" the mother cried, somewhat imprudently, and Blanche, laughing, but coloring deeply too, declared that she had already trespassed only too long on dear Lady West's kindness.

"Must she go, Charles?" Lady West took courage to say, as their guest ran out of the breakfast-room on to the terrace, with Pussums catching at her gown, and Bevis running and barking on before. "My dear, I think I was unjust, once, to Blanche. I thought her frivolous and spoiled. But now—oh, Charles, I am sure she is very fond of you and of Clem! And why shouldn't you make a home for yourself again? You get on so well together. She is so very sweet-tempered."

Sir Charles was selecting a cigar with much care from his case.

"Would it make you happier, indeed—you and Pussums, mother—if Blanche Lancaster stayed?" he asked, without looking up.

She laid a trembling hand upon his arm, but did not speak. The young man lifted the kind hand and kissed it, and then, taking up his hat, he went out on to the terrace to light his cigar. He could hear little Clementina's voice calling to Bevis far down the prim poplar-alley, and Blanche singing the refrain of a little Breton song she had learned, with her cookery, from Nanon. It was all very tranquil and home-like. He had made up his mind, at last, to do as his mother wished; but he was in no hurry. He believed that Blanche would say yes, and he would be grateful to her for saying it, but there was no hurry; and, as he followed the sound of the happy voices down the garden-alley, he leisurely struck a match and lighted his cigar.

And then suddenly—he never could explain the feeling afterward, or account for it, or reason about it—suddenly, just as he came

within sight of Mrs. Lancaster, who was sitting on a bench with a big white umbrella over her head, an urgent thought of Cherry shot through his mind like a swift pang, and he knew that she wanted him, or was in some danger. Somehow he did not feel surprised or excited, though the conviction was strong upon him. He only walked very quietly up to Blanche, and told her that he had come to say good-bye for a few days, as he had been summoned, that moment, to England on business.

"It will be very kind of you," he added a little wistfully, "to stay with my mother until I return." He was wondering secretly why, after those two years of misery, he could not have been left there, in the sunshine, to marry the pretty woman who had blushed at his approach. But he did not hesitate at all about going.

Blanche Lancaster looked at him with a half-puzzled scrutiny.

"Will you come back?" she asked lightly, but sighing too.

"I will come back, certainly, as soon as I am free."

"Ah!" She shook her head and turned a little pale, though she smiled. "I think we had better say good-bye again, Sir Charles, and for more than a few days, this time."

* * * * * * *

Sir Charles found the house in Eden Row shut up. His heart was throbbing loud and fast as he opened the gate and entered the quiet old passage. How had he ever persuaded himself that he had forgotten Cherry? At sight of the prim old-fashioned windows, of the very knocker on the narrow door, the old pain and joy sprung into fiercest life within him. Her innocent pale face rose before him; he heard the ring of her girlish voice, and felt the shy touch of her hands about his neck, as he had felt them that night—that dreadful night!—that had separated them forever and ever. The young man shuddered in spite of himself as he recalled his last visit to the red-brick house in Eden Row.

He knocked again—he had waited some minutes, lost in thought—but no one appeared in answer to his summons. He noticed at last that the house looked neglected and deserted. The windows were covered with dust and grime, the blinds were yellow, the steps untended. He knocked for the third time, and then a little maid-servant came out of the next house, and told him that Mr. Beauclerk had gone away, near upon two years ago, she thought. She did not know where, but would ask her mistress, if the gentleman pleased.

But the mistress could give him no information. She had heard,

she admitted, that Mr. Beauclerk had sailed for New Zealand, where he had a sister very well married, but—

Sir Charles thanked her, and turned away, and out at the iron gate, where the old lamp had just been lighted, and was glimmering among the ivy, and across the windows of the room that had been Cherry's.

"Why did I ever leave her?" the young man groaned. "Why, in my selfish cowardice, did I forsake her, not knowing how soon she might need a friend? Well, I will find her now, if I have to follow her to New Zealand, and if this queer conviction lasts, which is every moment growing stronger, that she wants my help. It sounds romantic, I dare say, but it is none the less true, and I will be her brother, tardily enough, if I can be nothing else."

His inquiries at the office in Conyngham Lane and elsewhere led to no result; and there was nothing for it, he felt, but to go back to town, and start afresh.

His heart was full of memories of Cherry. It seemed a year since he had followed the voices down the alley of the old Breton garden, resolving to ask Blanche Lancaster to be his wife. He knew, now, that there was only one woman in the world whom he loved, or had ever loved—the woman whom he must never marry.

Only disappointment appeared to await him in London. He found himself baffled at every turn. He could discover no traces whatever of Henry Beauclerk and the girl he had called his ward. But still he lingered, putting off his departure for the Continent from day to day, he did not know why.

"I believe I am afraid to go back and tell my mother and Pussums that I must go to New Zealand," he thought sometimes. "And that is what I shall have to do, if my advertisement leads to nothing, again, this week. That child is calling me still!"

London was very full; but no one knew that Sir Charles was in town. He had put up at a quiet hotel, determined not to let anything interfere with the purpose he had in view, and had carefully kept out of people's way. What had he to do with the season and its gayeties, while his heart was heavy with that nameless haunting trouble that never left him day or night?

The week passed, and his advertisement remained unanswered.

"I will go back to Laroque to-morrow," he decided, drawing a long breath.

He would have given worlds not to undertake the voyage he was going to announce to Lady West and his little daughter, but he knew that he would go, if necessary.

It was a mild May evening, and the streets were thronged with carriages, as he turned from the door of his hotel, and mingled with the stream of passers-by. He had various messages from his mother to deliver to the woman who had been left in charge of the house in Brook Street, but until the last moment he had shrunk, with the greatest reluctance, from crossing the threshold. He dreaded to enter the empty holland-shrouded rooms where he had first met the pretty child whom he had lost for evermore. He remembered their meeting so well. It came back to him as he walked; and he saw Cherry, in her white dress, running into the room where he was falling asleep over his book, and startling him out of his dreams with the loveliest face his eyes had ever seen.

"If I had known," the young man thought, shuddering in the mild evening air, "would it have saved me from loving her?"

He remembered her pretty eager chatter, her artless and absorbed strumming on the piano; her questions with her eyes fixed gravely on him.

"She looked so sweet, and fair, and happy!" Something like a sob rose in his throat. "And she smiled at me, and blushed, and did not know— Heaven help her!"

He was crossing the square now, and turning into Brook Street. A pretty face that he knew flashed past him in a carriage, out of a mist of white draperies. One or two of the houses were shut up; before another straw was laid down; music was issuing from the windows of a third, whose door was thronged with vehicles and a little crowd of on-lookers.

At last he reached his own, whose shuttered windows looked blankly at him in the dusk as he passed before it thinking, remembering, rebelling.

A woman, poorly clad, and a boy, were standing at the railings. The woman seemed to be looking up at the empty balcony, but, as Sir Charles paused on the step, she drew back hurriedly and turned to go away.

It was Cherry.

Sir Charles never knew how long they stood there, holding each other's hands, and looking into each other's eyes. At sight of the child's sweet and fading face he came near breaking down utterly.

"Cherry, my little Cherry," he murmured at length, in hoarse slow-coming words. He had forgotten for a time all that divided them; he only remembered that she had been lost, and was now found. "Cherry, I am here, you see; I have come to take care of you. You wanted me, did you not? You came here to find me?"

She shook her head. Her dark sweet eyes—there were black rings round them now—were still eagerly traveling all over his face, as though they could never satisfy themselves with looking. She did not seem surprised to see him.

"No," she said, quietly leaving her hand in his. "I did not come to find you, Sir Charles, but"—her lip began to tremble—"I am glad, oh, very glad that I have seen you again to-day!"

"To-day—why to-day, dear? Why are you here alone, at this hour; it is not safe, my child; you should not run such risks."

A little smile brightened Cherry's wan face.

"I am not by myself," she explained, pulling forward the lad who stood near her, and who had been shrewdly eying her friend. "Sam is with me, you see. Sam is my landlady's son. He knows his way quite well, and can take good care of me—can't you, Sam?"

Sam nodded.

"I'd like to see any harm come to Miss Vanbrugh, when I'm here, sir," he said composedly; and Sir Charles resolved that Sam should presently receive such a tip as he had never dreamed of in his boyish philosophy.

"Sam is a good fellow," he said heartily, and then, his voice sinking again—"But, Cherry, if you did not come to look for me, what are you doing here, and—and, my child, why are you in these clothes?"

Cherry looked down, a little surprised, at her shabby gown and jacket. She had evidently grown accustomed to them.

"These are the only things I have," she answered, with her old direct simplicity. "We are poor now, Sir Charles, Henry says. He has been ill, and could not work, and he would not spend any of my money. I have never thought about buying clothes."

"You are still in his care then?" Sir Charles asked, more and more puzzled.

"Yes"—quietly. "Lady West and Pussums must not feel hurt because I did not write or answer their dear letters, Sir Charles. Henry did not wish me to do so. Are they"—her face lit up eagerly—"are they here, too? Shall I see them again, before—"

"Before what?"—Sir Charles held her hands closer when she would have drawn them away. "They are not in town, Cherry. You must come back with me to my mother."

She shook her head.

"I see them every day," she said simply, "just by shutting my eyes. And—and you, too"—faltering. "You do not think it was wrong of me to come here, Sir Charles? I could not help it. I

stole away with Sam while Henry was asleep. I wanted to see the house just once more."

"Once more? Cherry, are you, then, going away?"

"No. But after to-day everything will be so different. I—I am going to be married."

She spoke with a kind of dreary calm, and the young man, dropping her hands, drew back, amazed

"To be married?" he cried, in a hoarse whisper. "Cherry—to whom, in Heaven's name? And has Henry Beauclerk given his consent?"

"It is to Henry I am going to be married," the girl answered sadly; and Sir Charles reeled, and caught blindly at the wall, like one stricken with a dreadful blow.

* * * * * * *

Sir Charles never remembered how they reached the house where Henry Beauclerk and he were to meet again. No doubt Cherry's little protector, Sam, had brought them safely there. The young man was conscious of nothing but a dull sense of wonder why such a strange tragedy should have crossed his easy-going commonplace English life, and that of the pretty pale child at his side, the little thing who seemed born to be cherished and sheltered from danger in a loving home.

He held her hand closely in his as they walked along; he felt as if he could never, never let it go again; and Cherry was quite still and happy. She did not know why he had gone away, or what had brought him back; but for an hour at least he was with her again, and for just that one hour she would yield to the sweet bewildering joy that his presence filled her with.

"You will not speak angrily to Henry?" she faltered, at last, when they reached the door of the humble lodging-house in which her lover had hidden her away. "I promised to marry him of my own free will—indeed I did! He was so ill, and so unhappy, and he was afraid that some day I would leave him. Besides"—hanging her head in her old pretty fashion—"you were gone. He had told me you would not come back—I was sorry, but I did not blame you, Sir Charles; but, as you did not want me, I thought it would be right to give myself to poor Henry, who has no one but me to care for him at all."

"You need not be afraid, Cherry," the young man answered very gently, in spite of the smoldering wrath in his eyes. "Mr. Beauclerk and I have a—a misunderstanding to clear up, but I will re-

member his weak health, I promise you. I will not be harder upon him than I can possibly help."

"And—and you will let me run upstairs and tell him you are here?" she urged. "Martha is sitting with him, in case he should awake and miss me. You remember old Martha, don't you? She came to London with us, and has been a kind friend to me ever since."

"Heaven bless old Martha!" muttered Sir Charles, and he added aloud—"My child, it is necessary that I should see Mr. Beauclerk alone. Show me the room and let me go in; I will send your maid down to you."

CHAPTER VIII.

For nearly an hour Sir Charles West sat in the shabby dimly lit room watching Henry Beauclerk, as he lay, sleeping uneasily, on the sofa.

The change in the poor fellow's appearance had shocked him, notwithstanding the fierce anger which was brooding within him. Henry's hair had grown quite gray; his jaws were hollow, the long womanish-looking hands, which he moved restlessly at times, seemed wasted, almost transparent.

"How can a man war against such a wreck as that?" thought Sir Charles, feeling as if he had been robbed of his lawful revenge. "I will not rouse him. Let him awake, and answer to me, if he can, for the infernal misery he has caused that child and me. He will not find me so easy a dupe this time!"

There was a death-like stillness about the house. Far off, the faint sound could be heard of an organ in the street, and of children shouting to each other in their play. In the room, only Henry's labored breath broke the hour-long silence. The night was close and airless; the scanty curtains hung down motionless by the glimmering square of the open window.

With patient impatience Sir Charles sat on, remembering his promise to Cherry; his eyes fixed on the sleeping man's face, his thoughts busy with the mystery he was there to solve.

"Shall I give you up now, my little Cherry?" he muttered, seeing that, at last, Henry had turned, and sighed, and thrown his arms feverishly above his head. "Never again! You are mine, and no other man's. Perhaps you can never be my wife, but you shall be my mother's daughter, to be guarded and cherished by us

as long as we both live. I forsook you before, for fear of a little pain to myself; nothing but death shall part us any more!"

He stood up, ready to face the worst, as he felt; and, at the same moment, Henry Beauclerk opened his eyes and saw him. The unhappy man sprung up, putting the damp gray hair back from his temples, and staring with sleep-bewildered eyes.

"You are there again?" he said in a hoarse whisper. "Why do you come night after night to torment me? Haven't I told you that you can not marry her?"

"I am no dream, as you would seem to imply, Mr. Beauclerk," was the cool answer. "I am a highly substantial reality, believe me, and I am here to demand from you an explanation."

Henry shrunk back a pace or two, beginning instinctively to arrange his disordered hair and garments. Sir Charles's voice seemed to have pierced through the lingering mists of his sleep, and recalled him instantaneously to himself.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, with a clumsy attempt at politeness. "I had no idea, of course. You wish to see me, you say? Cherry is—is not here; she—she is out, I am afraid."

His wasted hands were trembling as he spoke; he avoided Sir Charles's steady gaze, and turned away to find his visitor a chair.

"She has been out," the young man answered, unmoved. "I had the pleasure, an hour ago, of bringing her home."

"You have seen her—seen Cherry?"

"I have."

"And—and she has told you?"

"Of your intended marriage with her to-morrow? Yes."

Henry Beauclerk uttered a piteous and uncouth sound, and struck his temples wildly with his clinched hands. Then, turning, he saw Sir Charles's eyes still fixed upon him in a somewhat contemptuous scrutiny, and he made another effort at self-control.

"It is true," he answered, pressing his shaking fingers together. "But I do not see that the news concerns any one but Miss Vanbrugh and myself; you least of all, Sir Charles West."

"It concerns me most of all," Sir Charles retorted quietly. "I told you, sir, that I was here for the purpose of demanding an explanation. Have you so soon forgotten our last interview—the answer you gave me when I asked for Miss Vanbrugh's hand in marriage?"

"It was impossible—utterly impossible, I tell you!" cried Henry, a lurid excitement beginning to flash from his eyes. "Why do you come back to mar our lives again? You who have everything else

the world can give, could you not have left me this child whom I love, and who belonged to me before she ever saw your cursed face?"

"Whom I love, and whom I would have made my happy and honored wife two years ago, but for you." Sir Charles's face was darkening ominously now. "I ask you again, if you have forgotten our last meeting, sir, and the ban you put upon my marriage with the girl who had given me her innocent heart, and to whom my honor was pledged? Do you think that any reason less awful than the one you gave me could have prevented me from keeping my word to her, even at the cost of life itself?"

In his excitement Sir Charles began to pace up and down the narrow room. Henry watched him, with furtive glances from under his shaggy eyebrows; he was biting his nails in the old nervous way, every vestige of color seemed drained from his hollow face.

"I went away," the young man went on, between his stormy strides—"I went away because I believed it to be my duty to tear myself from Cherry—for her sake, poor child, as well as for my own. I left her alone—may Heaven forgive me for it—in your care. For two miserable years I have tried my hardest to forget her, to believe that she had forgotten me, and was happy—but I could not; it was no use. And you see I have come back—come back to learn from the child's own innocent lips that you lied to me that night, like a dog, and that you yourself were about to marry the girl who, you assured me with a solemn oath, was born of an insane mother—a mother who died, as you declared, raving mad, after attempting the life of her husband, William Vanbrugh!"

"Hush! Not so loud!" Henry cried, springing forward, and clutching him by the arm. "Cherry must not hear you! The secret is between us two! She need never guess it. I will make her happy—I swear it! And, if you will hold your cursed tongue, who is to tell her that it is not she"—he broke into a long dreadful laugh—"it is not she who is mad, but I!"

Sir Charles started back horror-stricken; the breath of the madman was hot on his face, his eyes were gleaming dangerously.

"You?" he echoed hoarsely, a great swift throb of gratitude going up, in the midst of his own imminent peril, from his heart to Heaven—to Heaven who had called him back to Cherry in her awful need.

"Yes—I!" The unhappy wretch broke into another peal of blood-curdling laughter. "You were all very clever, but you never found it out! That is the real secret—it is I who am mad! But not

so mad"—he lowered his voice with instinctive caution—"that I did not know Melissa when she came to me that day in her black gown, and Frances would have turned her from the door. She is called Cherry now, and her eyes are dark, but she is my little sweetheart for all that, come back from her grave on the hill to tell me that she has forgiven me. She is my little murdered Melissa, who belongs to me—to me, I say! Take her from me, if you dare!"

He sprung with a savage cry at Sir Charles's throat, and the two men closed in a horrible struggle for life.

* * * * * * *

For a year after Cherry Vanbrugh became Lady West, Henry Beauclerk lived, harmless and happy, in a quiet suite of rooms, which had been set apart for his use at the Hall.

His first outbreak was his last, and, when he recovered from the illness which succeeded it, all recollections of later years seemed to have faded from his mind forever.

Little Lady West's daily visits were his greatest delight. He was incapable of recognizing her, but her sweet and compassionate face, and her gentle voice, appeared, as of old, to recall in some vague way his little dead love, Melissa Garth, about whom he was never weary of babbling to Cherry, or to Pussums, who often walked by the chair of the dying man, and filled his lap with flowers when he was brought out to take the air in a sheltered walk of the Hall gardens.

When at last the poor fellow went to his rest, they laid him close to the little grave in Manchester, where his heart had so long lain buried, and planted about him the homely garden flowers he had always loved the best.

* * * * * * *

Cherry has persuaded her husband—no very difficult task for her at any time—to let her make a little pilgrimage to the quiet Lancashire church-yard every year. She tells her two little lads that a man lies there who was very unhappy while he lived, and very good to her, and makes them promise that the two grassy graves shall never be neglected when her sons grow up, and she is an old, old woman.

"Little Cherry-mother," Pussums cries indignantly, when she overhears these remarks, "you will never be old. Hal and Charlie will bring my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave before long, I feel convinced—a pair of Turks. But as for you, darling, you are a ridiculous sort of little mother—only fit to be tormented and cuddled and kissed! Isn't she, Gran-Gran?"

"Ask papa," says Gran-Gran, smiling indulgently. "Here he comes up the yew-walk with Mrs. Lancaster."

"Papa!" There is a joyful shout, and a rush of little feet across the terrace and down the steps toward the break in the trees through which Sir Charles, sunburned and cheery, is seen approaching with a lady in a riding-habit.

"Blanche!" cries Clem, the irrepressible. "What color are the bride-maids to wear—is it decided? Do let us wear all white, because of your own pretty white name!"

"With bunches of cherry-blossoms?" suggests Blanche gayly, stooping to kiss the rosy little fellows who cling about her gown and Sir Charles's knees.

"We'll try the effect!" cries papa, running off with little Henry, and popping him gently on to his wife's white muslin back. "How do white muslin and cherry-blossoms go together, mother?" he calls to Lady West, who is watching their antics from the sunshiny old terrace. "There—be off, all of you! And, as you value your heads, see that the claret-cup be well iced at luncheon, and the supply inexhaustible. Come, my darling"—he drew his wife's little hand within his arm. "Blanche has the children in charge—you and I will go home together."

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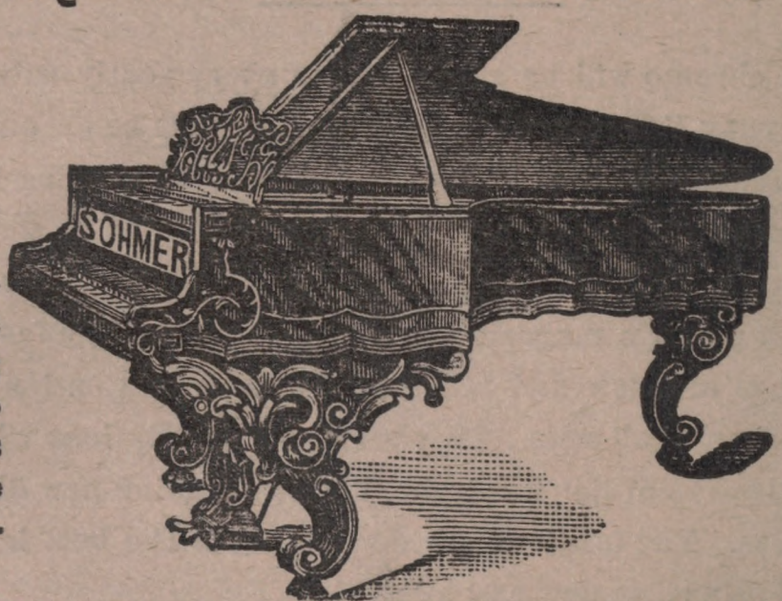

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